

## **ARIZONA WINTER SPECIALTIES**

*December 27, 2026 – January 2, 2027*



*Bendire's Thrasher is one of three desert thrashers that we'll seek on this tour. It is quite similar to the Curve-Billed Thrasher, another species we'll see, but Bendire's is a bit smaller, and the bill is not as long.  
Photograph by guide Micah Riegner.*

*We include here information for those interested in the 2026 Field Guides Arizona Winter Specialties tour:*

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

*These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:*

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from the website)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

**S**outhern Arizona is a great place to bird in winter! Yes, the trogons and hummingbirds have largely departed (but not all of them), and the Hooded Oriole nests hang empty in the sycamores. But other species have arrived to take their place. The wide and scenic Sonoita and San Rafael grasslands secret away a multitude of pipits, larks, sparrows, and longspurs. Bendire's, Crissal, and LeConte's thrashers sing from mesquite trees on the sparse desert flats west of Buckeye. Sandhill Cranes, numbering in the thousands, rise bugling from protected roosting and feeding sites in the Sulphur Springs Valley. A plethora of raptors ply the vast blue desert skies searching for prey and thermals. Winter irruptives, including Lewis's Woodpecker, Mountain Bluebird, and Lawrence's Goldfinch, appear in varying numbers from year to year, brightening the subdued landscapes when they occur. And Mexican species regularly wander across the border to add a tropical twist to the triplist.

This short tour is designed to sample the riches to be found in the lowlands of Southern Arizona in the winter: several productive watering holes and desert haunts around Phoenix and Tucson, the extensive riparian areas around Patagonia and Nogales, the San Rafael Grasslands near Sonoita, and the consistently birdy Sulphur Springs Valley near the Mexican border southeast of Tucson. Among the many species we'll be looking for during our stay are Ferruginous and "Harlan's" hawks, Bald and Golden eagles, Crested Caracara, Prairie Falcon, Mountain Plover, Hammond's, Gray, and Dusky flycatchers, the notoriously difficult-to-see Sprague's Pipit, an impressive assortment of sparrows including Grasshopper, Baird's, Rufous-winged, Rufous-crowned, Sagebrush, Bell's, Black-chinned, and Brewer's, and large numbers of Chestnut-collared and smaller numbers of Thick-billed (formerly McCown's) longspurs.

Additionally, this season has produced some very exciting finds from "south of the border." Ruddy Ground Dove and Rufous-backed Robin are now annual in Arizona in winter. Eared Quetzal, Short-tailed Hawk, Green Kingfisher, Nutting's Flycatcher, Rose-throated Becard, Sinaloa Wren, White-throated and Aztec thrushes, Blue Mockingbird, Crescent-chested and Rufous-capped warblers, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, and Streak-backed Oriole have also made recent appearances at this season. Who knows what it might be this year? Your guide is very experienced in the region and has plenty of local contacts, so we'll have up-to-the-minute information as to where and when any of these unusual species might be present. If you're looking to escape the winter 'blahs' and soak up some winter sun and see some exciting wintering birds, head to southern Arizona for a truly exceptional winter birding experience and see this wonderful state as you never have before!



*A number of Mexican species wander north of the border on occasion, such as the Rufous-backed Robin.  
Photograph by guide Micah Riegner.*

*We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.*

### **Physical requirements of this tour**

- **TRAILS & WALKING:** Light to moderate amounts of walking, some of it on paved roads, but many trails have hazards such as protruding rocks, fallen limbs or tree trunks, and thorny plants. In the mountains, some trails are steep in places. Unless there's an exceptional rarity that pops up along a trail, there will be no single walk exceeding 2 miles in distance; most are much shorter.

- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** We cover much ground on this tour, and some days will feature long periods of time in the vans and lots of roadside birding with lots of getting into and out of vans.
- **PACE:** Moderate pace without a lot of “down time” on this compact tour. Early mornings (6:00-6:30 a.m. breakfasts), usually with no afternoon breaks back at our hotel during the tour.
- **ELEVATION:** All of our birding will take place at moderately high elevations (1500-4500 feet).
- **WEATHER:** Winter weather is relatively mild in southeastern Arizona. Expect temperatures in the 20s-low 40s in the early morning and evening, with days in the 50s to 70s F. Rain and [rarely] snow are both possible during the winter months in s. Arizona.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Whenever possible, we use modern, indoor restrooms, but on occasion, participants must be prepared to make a comfort stop in nature.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with your guide.

## About the Birding Areas



**Phoenix Area**—The Phoenix area (ca. 1200 feet elevation) has long been a favorite for winter visitors (both human and avian!) and the “Valley of the Sun” boasts a number of fine birding sites within easy driving distance from the center of town. The primary site that interests us lies almost due west of town near the small farming community of Buckeye where the sparse vegetation in very alkaline soil hosts a few pairs of the scarce LeConte’s Thrasher, which is often actively singing at this season. The area where these birds are found often harbors a fine variety of other mimids at this season too, with Crissal, Bendire’s, Curve-billed, and Sage thrashers all being possibilities. Sagebrush and Brewer’s sparrows often abound in the sparse scrub here during the winter months as well, and small numbers of Bell’s Sparrow can sometimes be found here (Sage Sparrow was recently split into two species, Sagebrush and Bells’ sparrows, and both can be found wintering in Southern Arizona).

Weather at this season in the Phoenix and Tucson areas is typically great, with clear skies and highs in the mid-60’s to low 70’s F (sometimes a little warmer, sometimes a little cooler) and lows in the upper 30’s or low 40’s. Winter in Arizona can be wet and cool, though, if Pacific cold fronts happen to be moving through the state. If this

is the case, highs can drop to the 40’s and 50’s, light to moderate rain (or very rarely even snow) can be a nuisance all day long, and overnight and morning temperatures can drop to below freezing (that’s *cold* for an Arizonan!). With this possibility in mind, please plan your birding attire accordingly.

**Santa Cruz Flats** – The agricultural area between Tucson and Casa Grande is an excellent area for wintering open-country birds. Raptors abound here, including Ferruginous Hawk, “Harlan’s” Red-tailed Hawk, Prairie Falcon, and Crested Caracara. The Evergreen Sod Farm typically hosts a wintering flock of Mountain Plovers, and we sometimes find Great Horned Owls, Burrowing Owls, Bendire’s Thrashers, and more in the area. The few riparian shelter-belts near farmhouses here can host interesting wintering landbirds such as Ruddy Ground Dove, Rufous-backed Robin, and eastern warblers.



*Gambel's Quail is a common bird in much of southern Arizona. In some parks, these birds have become quite used to people, so they are very easy to see. Photograph by uide Cory Gregory.*

**Tucson Area**—Flanked on three sides by high pine-covered mountains, the open desert of the Tucson Valley (ca. 2600 feet elevation) and the surrounding areas are the best places to find the local Gilded Flicker and Rufous-winged Sparrow. Numerous other species typical of the Lower Sonoran Desert can also be found here, including Gambel's Quail, Gila Woodpecker, Costa's and Anna's hummingbirds, Cactus Wren, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Pyrrhuloxia.

**Patagonia/Sonoita Creek and Vicinity**— Although the tall and sturdy Fremont's Cottonwoods and Arizona Sycamores are leafless now and the kingbirds and orioles have long since departed for warmer climes, this area is still one of the richest in Arizona for birding at this season. Other than the Mexican vagrants that this area has attracted in recent years, three species of *Empidonax* flycatchers regularly winter here, as do a fine variety of woodpeckers, raptors, sparrows, and finches. We'll devote most of our time to birding the beautiful stretches of riparian woodland, but we'll also want to check a variety of other characteristic habitats of the area. The Patagonia area (ca. 4100 feet) is considerably cooler than the Phoenix and Tucson areas during the daytime, and it's likely to drop below freezing during the night and early morning hours.

**San Rafael Grasslands**—Seemingly out of place in this land of high mountains and parched desert lands, the expansive San Rafael Grasslands (ca. 5000 feet) offer a pleasant diversion for birders during the winter months. In the rolling, virtually treeless grasslands here, a few birds are found during the colder months with relative ease. A walk through the knee-high grass will give us a chance to see such difficult birds as Sprague's Pipit (rare), Grasshopper and Baird's sparrows, and Chestnut-collared, Thick-billed (formerly McCown's; rare), and possibly even Lapland longspurs. This is an excellent place for raptors as well, and we'll stay alert for the likes of White-tailed Kite, Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, and Prairie and Peregrine falcons.

**Sulphur Springs Valley**—Situated between the Chiricahua and Mule mountains, the Sulphur Springs Valley has long been a favorite winter haunt for Arizona birders. This flat land, devoted to cattle ranching and agriculture, attracts an impressive variety of raptors, waterfowl, finches, and a host of open-country birds to the fields, pastures, open desert, and ponds that make up this land. One of the winter highlights is the large number of Sandhill Cranes that winter in the valley (tens of thousands in recent winters). At dawn and at sunset, thousands of these stately birds can be seen flying to and from roosting grounds and favored feeding sites, and the sound of their constant bugling is not soon forgotten. The Willcox area (including the famous Lake Cochise) should offer some quail, waterbirds, raptors, and shorebirds for us to study. Weather permitting, it should be a memorable day of birding for our group.



*The Greater Roadrunner is an iconic desert species. We've had some very good views of this fascinating bird on previous tours. Photograph by guide Cory Gregory..*

## Itinerary for Arizona Winter Specialties

**Day 1, Sun, Dec 27. Arrival in Phoenix; late afternoon birding nearby.** Please plan to arrive in Phoenix **no later than 2:00 p.m.** and take the complimentary shuttle to our airport hotel. We will meet in the lobby at 3:00 p.m. to begin our birding at a nearby hotspot such as the Gilbert Water Ranch. Night in Phoenix.

**Day 2, Mon, Dec 28. Buckeye and the greater Phoenix area.** After a 6:00 a.m. breakfast at our hotel, this morning we'll make the drive west of Phoenix to the town of Buckeye where LeConte's Thrasher awaits us. It's not unusual at this season to record up to five or six species of mimids at this site, so we should get our fill of thrashers today. We'll also search for Sagebrush and Bell's sparrows in the area. The area southwest of Phoenix is often productive for such wintering species as Ruddy Ground Dove, a variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, wintering warblers, and the like so there should be plenty in this part of the valley to keep us busy for the morning, at least! We'll be sure to make a stop at a city park that hosts a good population of the introduced Rosy-faced Lovebird, a species recently added to the ABA checklist.

After we track down LeConte's Thrasher and others, in the afternoon we might drive to the Boyce Thompson Arboretum, east of Phoenix near the copper mining town of Superior, which is often home to several exciting winter visitors. It's one of the more reliable spots in the state for the shy Rufous-backed Robin from south of the border, but it also often harbors the likes of Williamson's Sapsucker, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Varied Thrush, or some other rare winter visitor along with the more common desert-dwelling species. Some winters, the Arboretum isn't so productive, and we'll devise an alternative site should we hear that a visit there won't be worth our while. Night in Phoenix.

**Day 3, Tue, Dec 29. Early birding around Phoenix; drive to Tucson via Santa Cruz Flats.** We'll have a couple of hours in the Phoenix area to search for anything that's eluded us up to this point before we start to work our way south along I-10. On our way south we'll check a couple of productive sod farms in the Santa Cruz Flats area south of Casa Grande for a wintering flock of Mountain Plovers, a group of Crested Caracaras or other wintering raptors, a variety of sparrows, and perhaps some wintering longspurs. Should we have missed the Bendire's Thrasher the day before in Buckeye, this area is quite good for the species, too. Night in Tucson.

**Days 4-6, Wed-Fri, Dec 30-Jan 1, 2027.** We'll base ourselves in our comfortable hotel in Tucson for the next three days, making day trips to track down the local specialties present this year and also to see the fine variety of wintering birds in southeast Arizona. "Mexican" specialties such as Rufous-backed Robin, Sinaloa Wren, Rufous-capped Warbler, Ruddy

Ground Dove, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, and Rose-throated Becard have all been reported at this season in the past several years, and the region might again be full of invading Western and Mountain bluebirds and Lawrence's Goldfinches—a rare winter event that occurs every few years in Southeast Arizona.

In addition to searching for the local rarities present, we'll also be able to devote some time to the rich grassland birding near Patagonia and the productive agricultural sites in the Sulphur Springs Valley southeast of Tucson. All of these sites are relatively easy day trips. Being based in Tucson for these three nights gives us a large degree of flexibility and we can revise our daily plans as needed just in case some other juicy waif makes an appearance during the course of the tour. Nights in Tucson.



*We'll spend time in the San Rafael Valley, southeast of Tucson, where we'll hunt for Baird's Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, and other grassland birds. Photograph by anonymous tour participant.*

**Day 7, Sat, Jan 2. Departure.** If you are flying out this morning from Tucson, be sure to arrange for the courtesy shuttle to the airport in plenty of time for your flight. Happy New Year!

## About Your Guide

**Micah Riegner** grew up exploring the ponderosa pine forests of Prescott, Arizona, and was fortunate to have parents who took him along on college field courses ranging from the coast of Mexico to the mountains of Costa Rica, where encounters with tinamous, barbets, and jacamars launched him into the birding world at a very young age.

During his time at Prescott College, he made frequent visits to Amazonian Brazil, where he guided at Cristalino Lodge and studied woodcreepers near Manaus for his Master's project (learning Portuguese along the way). He recently moved to Monterrey, Mexico, and looks forward to spending time with Maroon-fronted Parrots.

Micah guided tours with Bret Whitney, John Coons, Dan Lane, and Tom Johnson before joining Field Guides full time in 2019. His tour schedule covers various corners of Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Suriname, and the U.S., including Alaska, Colorado, and southern Arizona.

*"Kudos to **Micah Riegner**, who was an excellent guide. He has a calm demeanor and seemed unflappable. He was patient with all of us birders and always made sure everyone got on the bird. His enthusiasm was contagious." G.H. Arizona's Second Spring*

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for Micah's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

## Financial Information

**FEE: \$2950 from Phoenix to Tucson**

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$450**

**DEPOSIT: \$300 per person**

**FINAL PAYMENT DUE: June 30, 2026**

**LIMIT: 7**

## Other Things You Need to Know

**TOUR MANAGER:** The manager for this tour is Maria Zaslavskaya. Maria will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact her!

**AIR ARRANGEMENTS:** This tour begins in Phoenix, AZ and ends in Tucson, AZ.

**Arrival:** Phoenix (PHX) on December 27 no later than 2:00 p.m.

**Departure:** Tucson (TUS) on January 2 at any time.

Please wait to purchase airline tickets until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate. At that time, we'll be glad to assist with your flight arrangements at no service fee.

**DOCUMENTS:** A valid photo ID (such as a [REAL ID](#)-compliant U.S. driver's license or passport) is required of all passengers boarding domestic flights within the U.S.

**TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS:** The tour fee is \$2950 per person in double occupancy from Phoenix to Tucson. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 6, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 7, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

**The above fee does not include** your airfare to and from the tour, airport taxes, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

**The single supplement is \$450 for those requesting a single room.** If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact us at [fieldguides.com/contact-us/](https://fieldguides.com/contact-us/). Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

**Please send your deposit of \$300 per person;** see [fieldguides.com/payment-options/](https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/) for our Payment Options. **Full payment of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or by June 30, 2026.** We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later. Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

**TOUR LIMITS:** Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open.

**SMOKING:** Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refund of deposit and full payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date,

50% of the full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to protect your investment in case of injury or illness to you or an immediate family member before or during a trip. Because we must remit early and substantial deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer refunds for cancellations outside of our Cancellation Policy. If a participant is unable to join or continue a tour due to illness, all related expenses will be their responsibility, and no refunds can be issued for missed days. Please wait to purchase insurance until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate, as most policies are non-refundable.

For full details, visit our Trip Cancellation Insurance page at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/>.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

CJG 1/25; 3/25, 1/26CG; 2/26mz; peg