

Trip Report — Arizona Nightbirds & More (Maine Audubon Private tour) 2025

May 1-5, 2025 with Cory Gregory & Doug Hitchcox



We enjoyed this lovely Whiskered Screech-Owl on our first evening of birding in the famed Madera Canyon. Photo by guide Doug Hitchcox.

One of the best areas in the US to seek out nightbirds is southern Arizona and that's exactly where we spent this short trip together. Although the nightbirds were important and a priority, we also birded many other locations seeking a wide range of Southeastern Arizona specialties. I'm happy to say that the trip was a good one, filled with many awesome views of nightbirds, and some stellar daytime birds too! Thank you all for joining Maine Audubon and Field Guides for this private tour.



One of the most majestic views in southeastern Arizona, the entrance to Cave Creek Canyon in the Chiricahuas. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Our trip got underway on May 1 when we gathered in the afternoon for introductions and then departed for Box Canyon. A gorgeous desert canyon, this ravine was the focus for an hour or so as we searched for specialties. We came away with a flyover Golden Eagle, several species of hummingbirds, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Gambel's Quail, and some neat warblers like Lucy's, Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, Townsend's, and Wilson's. We then made our way over to the well-known Madera Canyon where we had a picnic dinner and began our nightbirding adventures together. The first of the nightbirds that evening were the many Lesser Nighthawks right from the picnic area. At least 20+ were seen, sometimes low and cruising up the road at eye-level! Farther up the canyon that night, we connected with a major target of ours, the diminutive Elf Owl! A short while later, we found another specialty, the Whiskered Screech-Owl (and we got great photos to boot!). What a great start to this short trip.



This Thick-billed Kingbird was a highlight on our final day of birding. Of all the kingbirds in the US, this one is the most range-restricted. Photo by guide Doug Hitchcox.

The next morning we departed Tucson and made our way east, stopping first at the Benson STP. We added 30+ species to our triplist, including some western goodies like Cinnamon Teal, Mexican Duck, Swainson's Hawk, Say's Phoebe, Cassin's Kingbird, Western Kingbird, Great-tailed Grackle, Phainopepla, and others. Some close Wilson's Phalaropes were especially nice to see. After taking a quick break at the Texas Canyon Rest Area and enjoying the crazy geology there, we continued east towards Willcox. On the way into town, we found a huge flock of Chihuahuan Ravens and Lark Buntings, both quality western species. The main birding stop, the Lake Cochise and the Twin Lakes Golf Course, was productive as ever and our quick stop netted 40 species. Waterfowl included Blue-winged, Cinnamon, and Green-winged teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, and Ruddy Duck. We had some nice shorebirds too including Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Killdeer, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Phalarope, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Willet, and Least Sandpiper. One of the major highlights here came along the entrance road when we found a singing Bendire's Thrasher! We also added Chihuahuan Meadowlark, MacGillivray's Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee, and others to our triplist. After some great Mexican food for lunch, we drove up to Pinery Canyon high in the

Chiricahuas. New species came fast and furious; Montezuma Quail, hearing a Spotted Owl, Acorn Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee, Hammond's Flycatcher, Pygmy Nuthatch, and Grace's, Black-throated Gray, and Red-faced warblers. Before long, it was time to make our way down into Portal to get settled in and to enjoy a meal.

That evening we started our Chiricahuan nightbirding by targeting a few species we still were searching for. Shortly after dusk, our success started to take shape; a stunning Western Screech-Owl sat point blank and a Common Poorwill came and got a good look at us as it hovered within arms reach! Farther uphill we heard another Whiskered Screech-Owl and also witnessed a Mexican Whip-poor-will singing and flying a few circles overhead. Whew, another great day of birding in Arizona.



The views we had of this Western Screech-Owl were nothing short of amazing. This moody owl was photographed by guide Doug Hitchcox.

The birding in Cave Creek Canyon in the Chiricahuas can be quite rewarding at any season. For us, that's where we started the next morning. After our picnic breakfast, we made our way up-canyon and into the famed South Fork. We enjoyed a fine mix of western species such as Blue-throated

Mountain-gem, Acorn Woodpecker, Hammond's Flycatcher, Mexican Jay, Bridled Titmouse, Violet-green Swallow, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Painted Redstart, and Hepatic Tanager. Later that morning we visited some birdfeeders in Portal and enjoyed a variety of new species from the comfort of our seats in the shade. Gambel's Quail, Inca Dove, Rivoli's Hummingbird, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Verdin, Cactus Wren, Lesser Goldfinch, Pyrrhuloxia, and Hooded Oriole all made repeated appearances. Farther down the road, and technically into New Mexico, we added Greater Roadrunner as well as paid a quick visit to the Desert Museum before our lunch spot.

After lunch and a siesta, we made our way uphill, deep into the forests of the Chiricahuas. We saw Mexican Chickadee and Hermit Warbler at East Turkey Creek, and then continued uphill. We enjoyed a picnic dinner in the lovely Pinery Canyon and as we ate and waited for dusk to come, we enjoyed some of the same high-elevation species and we even managed to hear Spotted Owl calling again! As darkness settled in, we birded farther downhill and managed to have great looks at a Mexican Whip-poor-will as it circled us and landed in trees.



We birded a fair bit during the daytime too! Our trip tallied a number of western flycatchers including this Hammond's Flycatcher in Cave Creek. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

This morning, we had time to visit Cave Creek Canyon once more and we aimed to finally connect with the quintessential Elegant Trogon. It was a gorgeous morning for a hike and so we went up the trail, birding along the way, hoping for this red and green specialty. Eventually, yes, we heard one singing just up ahead! The bird was trying to outpace us but we all got quick looks before it did. Success! It was a fine morning though for other species and we enjoyed seeing Hepatic Tanager, Painted Redstart, Grace's Warbler, Scott's Oriole, and Hutton's Vireo again. Back at the lodge, we packed up, departed Portal, headed north to the interstate via the lovely paved road, and paid one more visit to Willcox. This time, the wind was really howling! Still, we managed a new species and a rare one at that, an American Golden-Plover! A very good bird for your growing Arizona list! We continued west and visited Box Canyon once more. This time, we struck gold with a lovely view of a Thick-billed Kingbird. We returned to Madera Canyon one last time, this time with enough daylight to enjoy some of the day-birds. One of

the highlights was the rare Berylline Hummingbird but we also enjoyed point-blank looks at Arizona Woodpecker, Yellow-eyed Junco, dozens of Black-headed Grosbeaks, and more.



The Elf Owls we encountered weren't easy to find! We found this one though, up in Madera Canyon on our first evening together. Photo by guide Doug Hitchcox.

Here's a list of the other critters we encountered:

Cliff Chipmunk (*Neotamias dorsalis*) - Fairly common in rocky habitat.

Harris's Antelope Squirrel (*Ammospermophilus harrisi*) - Seen at feeders in Portal.

Common Rock Squirrel (*Otospermophilus variegatus*)

Mexican Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus nayaritensis*) - Range restricted, seen many times in the Chiricahuas.

Arizona Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus arizonensis*)

Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

Ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*) - Wow! A major highlight during a nightbirding outing.

Northern Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)



Was Red-faced Warbler the most-wanted of the warblers? Perhaps! We caught up to this one high up in the Chiricahuas, near Pinery Canyon. Photo by guide Doug Hitchcox.

Although our trip together was a short one, I was really happy to show you some parts of southeastern Arizona and especially exploring some of the nightbirds this neat area has to offer. From the awesome screech-owl views, the hovering poorwills and whip-poor-wills, to the fun western warblers, flycatchers, thrashers, and waterbirds, all were made better by having you along. A big thank you to each of you for helping make this trip happen. Thanks to Doug and Maine Audubon for organizing this, and thanks to the Field Guides staff in Austin for taking care of the details. I know Doug and I enjoyed having you along and we hope you made lots of fun memories of nightbirding in Arizona. Be safe!

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/377025>

-- Cory Gregory (Curlew)

Field Guides Birding Tours -- ARIZONA NIGHTBIRDS, 2025 (Private tour with Cory Gregory & Doug Hitchcox)



1 – 4 May 2025 (4 days) Link-only



 United States

Arizona | New Mexico | Subregions

 Cory Gregory



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip...






















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Species Observed
























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4	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Spatula discors</i>	▶  2
32	Cinnamon Teal	<i>Spatula cyanoptera</i>	▶  3
10	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	▶  3
2	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	▶  2
45	American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>	▶  3
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	▶  1
1	Mexican Duck	<i>Anas diazi</i>	▶  1
1	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	▶  1
8	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	▶  1
34	Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	▶  3
26	Gambel's Quail	<i>Callipepla gambelii</i>	▶  3
3	Montezuma Quail	<i>Cyrtonyx montezumae</i>	▶  1
5	Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	▶  2
4	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> *	▶  2
2	Inca Dove	<i>Columbina inca</i>	▶  1
15	White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>	▶  9
13	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	▶  6
1	Greater Roadrunner	<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>	▶  1
25	Lesser Nighthawk	<i>Chordeiles acutipennis</i>	▶  1
4	Common Poorwill	<i>Phalaenoptilus nuttallii</i>	▶  1
5	Mexican Whip-poor-will	<i>Antrostomus arizonae</i>	▶  3














2	Vaux's Swift	<i>Chaetura vauxi</i>	▶  1
11	White-throated Swift	<i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>	▶  2
5	Rivoli's Hummingbird	<i>Eugenes fulgens</i>	▶  3
3	Blue-throated Mountain-gem	<i>Lampornis clemenciae</i>	▶  2
4	Black-chinned Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus alexandri</i>	▶  3
2	Costa's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte costae</i>	▶  1
1	Rufous Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus rufus</i>	▶  1
3	Broad-tailed Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus platycercus</i>	▶  3
14	Broad-billed Hummingbird	<i>Cynanthus latirostris</i>	▶  4
1	Berylline Hummingbird	<i>Saucerottia beryllina</i>	▶  1
15	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	▶  2
21	Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	▶  3
12	American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	▶  2
1	American Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis dominica</i>	▶  1
6	Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	▶  2
34	Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	▶  2
201	Wilson's Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>	▶  3
14	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>	▶  3
1	Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>	▶  1
1	Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>	▶  1
23	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	▶  2
13	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>	▶  2
1	Franklin's Gull	<i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i>	▶  1
6	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	▶  1

2	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	▶  1
3	Eared Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	▶  1
2	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	▶  1
60	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	▶  13
1	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶  1
1	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	▶  1  1
2	Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	▶  2
2	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	▶  1
4	Whiskered Screech-Owl	<i>Megascops trichopsis</i>	▶  2
1	Western Screech-Owl	<i>Megascops kennicottii</i>	▶  1
6	Elf Owl	<i>Micrathene whitneyi</i>	▶  2
1	Elegant Trogon	<i>Trogon elegans</i>	▶  1
51	Acorn Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>	▶  8
1	Gila Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i>	▶  1
2	Ladder-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates scalaris</i>	▶  2
3	Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates villosus</i>	▶  3
2	Arizona Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates arizonae</i>	▶  2
5	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	▶  3
1	Western Wood-Pewee	<i>Contopus sordidulus</i>	▶  1
9	Hammond's Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax hammondii</i>	▶  3  4
1	Dusky Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax oberholseri</i>	▶  1
1	Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	▶  1
1	Say's Phoebe	<i>Sayornis saya</i>	▶  1



2	Vermilion Flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>	▶  2
1	Dusky-capped Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus tuberculifer</i>	▶  1
4	Ash-throated Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>	▶  4
1	Brown-crested Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus tyrannulus</i>	▶  1
3	Cassin's Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus vociferans</i>	▶  1
2	Thick-billed Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus crassirostris</i>	▶  1  1
15	Western Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	▶  4
1	Bell's Vireo	<i>Vireo bellii</i>	▶  1
3	Hutton's Vireo	<i>Vireo huttoni</i>	▶  3
2	Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay	<i>Aphelocoma woodhouseii</i>	▶  1
11	Mexican Jay	<i>Aphelocoma wollweberi</i>	▶  4
40	Chihuahuan Raven	<i>Corvus cryptoleucus</i>	▶  1
6	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	▶  3
4	Mexican Chickadee	<i>Poecile sclateri</i>	▶  2
14	Bridled Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus wollweberi</i>	▶  7
1	Verdin	<i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>	▶  1
1	Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	▶  1
7	Bank Swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	▶  2
2	Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	▶  2
8	Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>	▶  3
8	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	▶  2
18	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  3
2	Cliff Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	▶  1

6	Bushtit	<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>	▶  3
20	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Corthylio calendula</i>	▶  5
7	White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	▶  5
3	Pygmy Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pygmaea</i>	▶  1
1	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	▶  1
4	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	<i>Poliophtila caerulea</i>	▶  3
2	Rock Wren	<i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>	▶  1
4	Northern House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	▶  2
1	Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	▶  1
2	Cactus Wren	<i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i>	▶  1
5	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	▶  2
3	Curve-billed Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma curvirostre</i>	▶  2
1	Bendire's Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma bendirei</i>	▶  1
2	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	▶  2
1	Swainson's Thrush	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	▶  1
18	Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>	▶  5
3	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	▶  1
3	Phainopepla	<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	▶  3
26	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i> *	▶  6
29	House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	▶  6
6	Pine Siskin	<i>Spinus pinus</i>	▶  3
13	Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Spinus psaltria</i>	▶  3
1	Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>	▶  1

8	Brewer's Sparrow	<i>Spizella breweri</i>	▶  2
2	Black-throated Sparrow	<i>Amphispiza bilineata</i>	▶  1
31	Lark Sparrow	<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	▶  2
35	Lark Bunting	<i>Calamospiza melanocorys</i>	▶  1
1	Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	▶  1
11	Yellow-eyed Junco	<i>Junco phaeonotus</i>	▶  3
7	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	▶  2
5	Green-tailed Towhee	<i>Pipilo chlorurus</i>	▶  4
8	Spotted Towhee	<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	▶  4
2	Chihuahuan Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella lilianae</i>	▶  1
4	Hooded Oriole	<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>	▶  3
1	Bullock's Oriole	<i>Icterus bullockii</i>	▶  1
2	Scott's Oriole	<i>Icterus parisorum</i>	▶  2
1	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	▶  1
2	Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>	▶  1
7	Great-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	▶  3
2	Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>	▶  2
1	Lucy's Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis luciae</i>	▶  1
1	MacGillivray's Warbler	<i>Geothlypis tolmiei</i>	▶  1
1	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	▶  1
11	Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>	▶  1  6
7	Grace's Warbler	<i>Setophaga graciae</i>	▶  4
9	Black-throated Gray Warbler	<i>Setophaga nigrescens</i>	▶  6

4	Townsend's Warbler	<i>Setophaga townsendi</i>	▶  3
1	Hermit Warbler	<i>Setophaga occidentalis</i>	▶  1
17	Wilson's Warbler	<i>Cardellina pusilla</i>	▶  1  7
1	Red-faced Warbler	<i>Cardellina rubrifrons</i>	▶  1
3	Painted Redstart	<i>Myioborus pictus</i>	▶  3
2	Hepatic Tanager	<i>Piranga flava</i>	▶  2
3	Summer Tanager	<i>Piranga rubra</i>	▶  2
4	Western Tanager	<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>	▶  2
5	Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	▶  1
2	Pyrrhuloxia	<i>Cardinalis sinuatus</i>	▶  1
22	Black-headed Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus melanocephalus</i>	▶  4
1	Lazuli Bunting	<i>Passerina amoena</i>	▶  1

ADDITIONAL TAXA

14	Mallard/Mexican Duck	<i>Anas platyrhynchos/diazi</i>	▶  3
6	raven sp.	<i>Corvus sp. (raven sp.)</i>	▶  1