

# WINTER SOUTHERN ARIZONA

January 17 – 22, 2012

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*Somewhat surprisingly, winter is one of the very best times to bird southeastern Arizona. Many of the highly sought Arizona specialty birds, such as Whiskered Screech-Owl, Gilded Flicker, Arizona Woodpecker, Bendire's and Crissal thrashers, Bridled Titmouse, Painted Redstart, Yellow-eyed Junco, and Rufous-winged Sparrow, are resident and are readily found at this season. Raptors are present in greater numbers and diversity than at other times of the year. Sparrows abound in the desert flats and grasslands areas with over fifteen species possible. Desert thrashers are just beginning to breed and are perhaps easier to see in late winter than at any other season.*

*To top it all off, winter has proven to be the absolute best time to encounter vagrant species from Mexico. Ruddy Ground-Dove and Black-capped Gnatcatcher have become annual in recent years and Rufous-backed Robin nearly so. Other exotic species such as Rufous-capped Warbler, Streak-backed Oriole and Nutting's Flycatcher have made periodic appearances. In short, winter in southeastern Arizona is a birder's paradise.*

*Our exact schedule will be somewhat flexible (to allow for rarity searches), but we plan to cover four of the best and most varied regions in this corner of the state using Tucson as our base for all five nights. Generally mild weather, an abundance of birds, and hopefully some surprising rarities should be in store.*

*This tour may be combined with our "Winter Southern California" tour January 22–27, 2012 which immediately follows this trip with four days of superb birding from San Diego to the Salton Sea.*

**January 17, Day 1: Arrival in Tucson.** Participants may plan to arrive Tucson at any time today and transfer to our hotel where a room will be reserved in your name. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 5:30 p.m. for a brief orientation session followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn and Suites, Tucson Airport

**January 18, Day 2: Madera Canyon / Green Valley / Montosa Canyon.** This day will be devoted to exploring the various habitats of the Santa Rita Mountains, the grassland and desert slopes below these mountains. Much of our time will be spent in famous Madera Canyon where a wide variety of woodland species are possible. Feeders in the canyon should harbor Acorn Woodpecker, Mexican Jay, Bridled Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed and Yellow-eyed juncos, Pine Siskins, and likely some over wintering hummingbird such as Magnificent or Anna's. In the surrounding oak woodlands we will make a special effort to locate the uncommon Arizona Woodpecker, in addition to Red-naped Sapsucker, Hutton's Vireo, and hopefully, an over wintering Painted Redstart.

Desert grasslands and rocky draws below the canyon could yield a wide variety of sparrows, including the highly sought Rufous-winged Sparrow, and more widespread species such as Black-throated, Rufous-crowned, and Brewer's. Other species possible include Golden Eagle, Canyon and Rock wrens, Townsend's Solitaire (sporadic), Western Bluebird, and Canyon, Green-tailed, and Spotted towhees. In nearby Green Valley, the

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xeroscaped residential areas should produce such desert species as Gambel's Quail, Gilded Flicker, Gila Woodpecker, Cactus Wren, and Pyrrhuloxia. Time permitting, we will also visit rugged Montosa Canyon where there is a good chance of finding the uncommon and localized Black-chinned Sparrow, and at least an outside shot at the very rare Black-capped Gnatcatcher.

One night we will venture out for an owling expedition. Although not as vocal at this season we will search for both Western and Whiskered Screech-owls in the nearby canyons and foothills.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn and Suites, Tucson Airport

**January 19, Day 3: Patagonia / Nogales.** Most of today will spent in the bird rich riparian habitats that line Sonoita Creek and the Santa Cruz River. Tree-lined ponds at Kino Springs often harbor Common Ground-Dove, the spectacular Vermilion Flycatcher, Gray Flycatcher, and skulking Crissal Thrashers and Abert's Towhees. In the winter of 2005-06 a small group of Ruddy Ground-Doves joined the Commons at this location.

Nearby Patagonia Lake State Park has been one of Arizona's top winter birding hotspots the past several years. Rarities such as Rufous-backed Robin, Elegant Trogon, Black-capped Gnatcatcher (a pair had been resident but often hard to locate the past several years and was absent in 2011) and Nutting's Flycatcher have made appearances. While none of these are to be expected, regular fare at this spot includes Neotropic Cormorant, Common Merganser, Sora, Virginia Rail, Gila Woodpecker, Gray, Hammond's, and Dusky (uncommon) flycatchers, Verdin, Bewick's and Marsh wrens, Phainopepla, and Lincoln's Sparrow.

In the town of Patagonia, we will visit a wonderful set of feeders which are generally swarming with birds. Possibilities here include Inca Dove, Lazuli Bunting (sporadic) and Abert's and Green-tailed towhees among others. There is also the chance of some over wintering hummingbird (in some years the flashy Violet-crowned) at this location.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn and Suites, Tucson Airport

**January 20, Day 4: North Tucson / Santa Cruz Flats.** Sweetwater Wetlands in northwest Tucson is a lovely oasis in the midst of the often harsh desert. A series of ponds here attracts a variety of waterfowl which should include Cinnamon Teal. Other likely species include Harris's Hawk, Common Moorhen, Abert's Towhee, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Further north, the Redrock cattle pens play winter host to good numbers of spectacular Yellow-headed Blackbirds. In addition, Lark Buntings often frequent the desert areas adjacent to the cattle pens. In recent years this site has been good for the increasingly reliable Ruddy Ground-Dove as well.

A short distance away lies the Santa Cruz Flats. Sod farms, agricultural fields, and desert scrub combine to form an excellent birding area. Small numbers of the endangered Mountain Plover winter in this area, and although they can be devilishly hard to find, are a real possibility. Other species to look for here include Ferruginous Hawk and Prairie Falcon. Nearby desert scrub provides chances for Mountain Bluebird (irregular), Bendire's Thrasher, Sage Thrasher (irregular), Loggerhead Shrike, and a variety of sparrows, including Vesper, Savannah, Sage (uncommon), Brewer's, and White-crowned. The late afternoon will be open to chase after any unusual species in the Tucson area.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn and Suites, Tucson Airport

**January 21, Day 5: Sulphur Springs Valley.** A longer drive today will lead us to the birdy Sulphur Springs Valley. This area is renowned for its great raptor viewing with uncommon species such as Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie Falcon, and Golden Eagle all likely during the course of the day. Red-tailed Hawks and Northern Harriers abound, and there should be a sprinkling of accipiters as well. Toward the southern end of the valley large concentrations of Sandhill Cranes (about 20,000) gather around Whitewater Draw. The sights and sounds of thousands of cranes at once is always a highlight. Whitewater also attracts a good variety of waterfowl and may harbor Snow and Ross's goose, Wilson's Snipe, Horned Lark, Black Phoebe, and Vermilion Flycatcher. The grasslands and agricultural areas of the valley also host large numbers of wintering sparrows with Lark

Bunting and Brewer's Sparrow among the expected species. Other targets here include Scaled Quail, Bendire's Thrasher, Crissal Thrasher, and possibly longspurs.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn and Suites, Tucson Airport

**January 22, Day 6: Departures for home.** Participants may plan to depart for home at any time today. Those continuing on to the Winter Southern California tour may fly to San Diego from Tucson; Southwest Airlines has several non-stop flights daily. If you have time and plan on extending your stay in Tucson, you are encouraged to visit the unique Sonora Desert Museum, west of Tucson. A remarkable exhibit of living flora and fauna can be observed here, all from the Sonora Desert of southern Arizona and northwestern Mexico.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS: Barry Zimmer and Brennan Mulrooney**

**Barry Zimmer** has been birding since the age of eight. His main areas of expertise lie in North and Central America, but his travels have taken him throughout much of the world, including such exotic locales as Japan, Russia, Madagascar, Africa, and New Zealand. Barry is a longtime member of the New Mexico Bird Records Committee, and served on the Texas Bird Records Committee for 12 years. He has co-authored three books: *Birds of the Trans-Pecos*, *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*, and *Birds and Birdfinding in the El Paso Area*. Barry has a keen interest in nature photography, having captured over 1,000 species of birds on film. His other interests include sports (a diehard Red Sox fan), cooking, and movies. He received his degree in psychology at the University of Texas in El Paso. Barry resides in El Paso with his wife, Yvonne, and their daughter, Alexandra.

**Brennan Mulrooney** was born and raised in San Diego, California. Growing up, his heart and mind were captured by the ocean. He split his summer days between helping out behind the scenes at southern California's leading aquarium and working on sport fishing vessels off the coast. As a wildlife and fisheries biology major at UC Davis, he developed his fascination with birds and love of birding while taking a required ornithology course. Since graduating from UC Davis, Brennan has traveled throughout the United States working on widespread ornithological field studies. His work has taken him from the mountains of northern California to the Salton Sea in southern California, and from Cape May, New Jersey to Key Largo, Florida. Currently Brennan lives in San Diego with his wife Brynne and their son Declan. Participants often comment that Brennan's sharp eyes, sharper wit, and easygoing attitude make it a pleasure to bird with him.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is \$tba per person in double occupancy from Tucson, Arizona. This includes all meals from Dinner on Day 1 to Breakfast on Day 6, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Tucson and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is \$tba. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$300** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$150** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$50** per person. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$150*
Between 120 and 90 days before departure	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded
Fewer than 90 days before departure date	No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$50 per person.

**TRIP INSURANCE:** A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness.** VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. Contact *Travel Insured International* prior to registration for details. Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than *Travel Insured International*, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

**CLIMATE AND ALTITUDE:** The weather in Arizona is generally quite pleasant at this season. Daytime highs average in the low 60s and nighttime lows in the mid 30s. Because of the higher elevation, however, temperatures could be cooler, possibly dipping down into the 20s at night and not surpassing the upper 40s to low 50s in the day. Rain is possible at this season, as is snow if it gets cold enough. One year we had two days in the low 80s and another year experienced a snowstorm in Madera Canyon, so a wide range of temperatures is possible. Altitudinal changes will vary from about 2200 feet to near 6000 feet elevation. Most walks on this tour will be over short distances (a mile or less) and will be conducted at a moderate to leisurely pace.

**CLOTHING:** Basic field clothing is appropriate for this tour. A combination of long-sleeved and short-sleeved shirts may be useful given the widely varying temperatures. Cool mornings will call for sweaters, light jackets, and possibly a heavy jacket, gloves, and a warm hat up in the mountains. Be sure to have a comfortable pair of walking shoes or hiking boots and a second pair of lightweight shoes. Casual attire is acceptable for all restaurants in which we dine. Lightweight raingear is also recommended.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, any medications and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Sunglasses, lip-balm, and an alarm clock are recommended. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

**HEALTH:** If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots.

**INSECTS:** Insects should not be a problem (and in fact may be nearly nonexistent) in late January; however if you wish to take precautions we suggest bringing one bottle of Cutter's or Off.

**SCHEDULE:** Most mornings we will have breakfast around 6:00 a.m. Birding will generally conclude in the afternoon by 5:30 to 6:00 p.m.

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website, [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com) offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You can also visit such other online stores such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) which specializes in ornithology books.

***Field Guides and General Reading:***

- Beadle, David and James Rising. *Sparrows of the United States and Canada; The Photographic Guide*. Academic Press. London, 2002
- Dunn, John L. *A Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. 4th ed. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2002.
- Epple, Anne Orth. *A Field Guide to the Plants of Arizona*. The Globe Pequot Press, 1995.
- Kaufmann, Kenn. *Mammals of North America*. Houghton Mifflin, 2004
- Sibley, David. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. New York: Knopf, 2000.
- Sibley, David. *The Sibley Guide to Birds of Western North America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.
- Twiet, Susan J. *The Great Southwest Nature Factbook*. Alaska Northwest books. Washington, 2002.
- Wheeler, Brian K. and William S. Clark. *A Photographic Guide to North American Raptors*. Academic Press, San Diego, California, 1995
- Zimmer, Kevin J. *Birding in the American West*. Cornell University Press, 2000.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can

accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved 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. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect at the time of publication and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.