

FIELD REPORT

**SOUTHEAST ARIZONA:
THE CHIRICAHUA MOUNTAINS
JULY 19–25, 2021**



Owl fledgling that led our group to christen the Spotted Owl as the bird of the trip © Brian Gibbons

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We started our exploration of Southeast Arizona on a steamy morning. The rugged Tucson Mountains at Gate's Pass and the famous Arizona Sonora Desert Museum all came after an excellent breakfast at Snooze in Tucson. Before we made it to the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum, we cruised through Tucson Mountain Park and Ironwood Picnic Area to track down a few desert birds. While we encountered a few Gilded Flickers, they were flighty. Finally, in the museum, we found a few migrants and our hoped-for Costa's Hummingbird. The grounds of the museum integrate the natural surroundings beautifully into



Mammillaria cactus were in bloom on the museum grounds in response to the ample summer rains. © Brian Gibbons

displays of native animals. Zebra-tailed Lizard, Hooded Orioles, and Phainopeplas all brightened our visit to the museum. After being thoroughly steamed for a couple of hours while meandering through the Saguaros and newly greened desert courtesy of the record monsoons, we headed to lunch and east to the Chiricahua Mountains.



Lesser Goldfinch feeding on sunflower © Brian Gibbons

Cave Creek Ranch and the Chiricahuas hadn't been as fortuitous with the summer rains yet, but their luck would change. The array of feeders for birds and wildlife always had a menagerie at the door. Reed Peters, the owner of Cave Creek Ranch, feeds everything—Acorn Woodpeckers, Black-headed Grosbeaks, goldfinches, and Bridled Titmice; and the two

common hummers were the stunning Broad-billed Hummingbird and the huge Blue-throated Mountain-gem. From our comfortable base at the Ranch in Cave Creek Canyon we ranged into the desert and grasslands below Portal and into the heart of the oak canyons and pine and fir forest that host the birds for which the Chiricahuas are famous.



Chihuahuan Spotted Whiptails were seen scurrying in the woodland © Brian Gibbons

On our first morning we explored the famous South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon, which we found surprisingly quiet. Eventually, while waiting for the Elegant Trogons to show, we found a few birds like

Painted Redstart, Scott's Oriole, Mexican Jay, and others. We then wound our way up the mountain and over Onion Saddle, where we watched White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows swooping up insects to feed their young. We then descended to Pinery Canyon, where among the pine Douglas Fir and oaks we found a somnolent Spotted Owl adult that seemed to keep one eye on a fuzzball fledgling that was nearby. This sighting, voted the bird of the tour—a range-restricted species that we were able to study at length in the scope—was indeed very rewarding. We met Jackie, our caterer in Barfoot Park where we enjoyed the weather and lunch before abandoning our picnic tables in the pursuit of Mexican



White-throated Swift carrying an insect bolus for feeding nestlings © Brian Gibbons

Chickadee, the specialty of the Chiricahuas, as this is the only publicly accessible range in the US that hosts this species. Down the road at Rustler, we found more Mexican Chickadees and a brief couple of Olive Warblers, another southeast Arizona specialty. Back in Cave Creek, a pair of Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers cooperated for scope views before we got back to the ranch and another beautifully prepared meal by Carrie, our primary caterer.



Adult Spotted Owl keeping a watchful, if rather somnolent eye, on the fledgling © Brian Gibbons

On a couple of evenings we ventured out after dark; right on the grounds of the ranch we had a cooperative Elf Owl that we studied in the scope while its fledglings, that we could never find, hid in the surrounding trees. On another night in Cave Creek Canyon, we finally tracked down Whiskered and Western screech-owls and had great looks at each species. Further down the road, the Mexican Whip-poor-wills called constantly and gave us some quick flyover looks. When returning to the ranch in the dark one evening, our path was blocked by an enormous and beautiful Black-tailed Rattlesnake, no doubt taking advantage of the spilled seed and the abundant rodents at the ranch.

On our second day we ventured out of the mountains into the Chihuahuan Desert that surrounds the mountains. Near Portal, we had nice studies of

Thick-billed Kingbird. In the grasslands we found singing Botteri's Sparrows that were territorial, as they breed with the onset of the summer rains. In the drier desert near Rodeo, New Mexico we found Black-throated Sparrows, Gambel's Quail, Pyrrhuloxia,

Blue Grosbeak, and Ash-throated Flycatcher. Our sojourn through the grasslands farther south failed to turn up the hoped-for Burrowing Owl. Amazingly, the Sky Island Grill patio hosted a nesting Roadrunner, tucked in above the I-beams! In the afternoon we returned to the cool oak canyons to take in some feeder activity. The local Blue-throat was a little too aggressive to allow great studies of the rare Violet-crowned Hummingbird, but we saw it!



Male Hepatic Tanager that entertained us along the road © Brian Gibbons

On our last full day, we traveled through the mountains again. But before breakfast, a few hearty souls tried one last time for Elegant Trogon at the nest in South Fork. Success! The birds were calling shortly after we arrived; soon we spotted the male, then the female popped out of the nest hole. The male went in after the female disappeared for feeding, and it was all over. But we saw the iconic bird of Southeast Arizona quite well! Along Turkey Creek we had a great visit by a Grace's Warbler that was wrapping up its summer visit to Arizona before heading south for winter. We stopped at the George Walker House to watch the feeders, the best place to find the Juniper Titmouse. The Titmice obliged and visited the seed and water a few times along with their fancier cousin, the Bridled Titmouse. We also visited Dave Jasper's yard, where we saw more desert-affiliated species. Northern Cardinal and its cousin the Pyrrhuloxia allowed for

good comparisons. Hooded Oriole, Cactus Wren, Black-headed Grosbeak, and a few hummers were all easily seen in Dave's yard near Portal.



Greater Roadrunner with a lizard snack near Rodeo, New Mexico © Brian Gibbons

Our final morning dawned overcast with an ominous forecast. I was hoping we could round up a Red-faced Warbler before the skies opened up with much-needed rain. It wasn't to be, and our entire journey up and over the mountains and out to Willcox was in the rain.



Stilt Sandpipers and a Lesser Yellowlegs at Willcox after the rain © Brian Gibbons

Fortunately, the rain stopped, and we enjoyed good bird activity around the golf course and ponds near Willcox. Shorebirds were plentiful, and land birds were out and about after the rain. Scaled Quail, a transient Black Tern, Mexican Duck, Baird's and Stilt sandpipers, Cassin's Kingbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Ruddy Ducks, and a few American Coots rounded out our list for the week.



Cassin's Kingbird in Willcox, after the rain © Brian Gibbons

Carrie and Jackie each provided us with delicious meals while birding and back at the ranch. Their service allowed us to get out early in the mornings and stay out to enjoy all the birds we could. Through thunderstorms and power outages they kept us well-fed. Thanks to both of them.



Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher in Cave Creek Canyon © Brian Gibbons

ITINERARY

20 July 2021 – Gates Pass, Tucson Mountain Park & Ironwood Picnic Area, Arizona Sonora Desert Museum, all the way to Cave Creek Ranch in the Chiricahuas.

21 July 2021 – Cave Creek Ranch, South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon, Turkey Creek, Onion Saddle, Pinery Canyon, Rustler Park, Barfoot Park, South Fork Cave Creek Canyon, owling on Cave Creek Ranch and Forest Rd 42.

22 July 2021 – Road to Rodeo, NM, Willow Tank, Rucker Canyon Road, Herb Martyr Road and Crystal Cave trailhead.

23 July 2021 – Roads near Southwest Research Station, South Fork Cave Creek Canyon, Turkey Creek, George Walker House, Jasper House near Portal, South Fork Cave Creek Canyon, night birding in Cave Creek Canyon.

24 July 2021 – South Fork Cave Creek Canyon and roads around Southwest Research Station before breakfast, Onion Saddle and transit of Chiricahuas in the rain, Willcox Twin Lakes Golf Course and Lake Cohise.

Waterfowl		
Northern Shoveler		
Mexican Duck		
Ruddy Duck		
New World Quail		
Scaled Quail		
Gambel's Quail		
Pheasants, Grouse & Allies		
Wild Turkey		
Grebes		
Pied-billed Grebe		
Pigeons and Doves		
Rock Pigeon (I)		
Band-tailed Pigeon		
Eurasian Collared-Dove (I)		
Inca Dove		
White-winged Dove		
Mourning Dove		
Cuckoos		
Greater Roadrunner		
Nightjars		
Lesser Nighthawk		
Mexican Whip-poor-will		
Swifts		
White-throated Swift		
Hummingbirds		
Rivoli's Hummingbird		
Blue-throated Mountain-gem		
Black-chinned Hummingbird		
Anna's Hummingbird		
Costa's Hummingbird		
Broad-tailed Hummingbird		
Broad-billed Hummingbird		
Violet-crowned Hummingbird		
Rails, Gallinules & Coots		
American Coot		
Stilts & Avocets		
Black-necked Stilt		
American Avocet		
Plovers and Lapwings		
Killdeer		
Sandpipers & Allies		
Stilt Sandpiper		
Baird's Sandpiper		
Least Sandpiper		
Long-billed Dowitcher		
Anatidae		
<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		Willcox = Twin Lakes Golf and Lake Cochise
<i>Anas diazi</i>		Willcox
<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>		Willcox
Odontophoridae		
<i>Callipepla squamata</i>		Willcox
<i>Callipepla gambelii</i>		Desert areas and CCR = Cave Creek Ranch
Phasianidae		
<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>		Mountains
Podicipedidae		
<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>		Willcox
Columbidae		
<i>Columba livia</i>		Tucson
<i>Patagioenas fasciata</i>		CCR & Mountains
<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		Towns
<i>Columbina inca</i>		CCR
<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>		Common
<i>Zenaida macroura</i>		Common
Cuculidae		
<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>		Rodeo, NM carrying a lizard, nesting at café!
Caprimulgidae		
<i>Chordeiles acutipennis</i>		Tucson
<i>Antrostomus arizonae</i>		CCC = Cave Creek Canyon
Apodidae		
<i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>		CCR & Mountains
Trochilidae		
<i>Eugenes fulgens</i>		Mountains
<i>Lampornis clemenciae</i>		CCR
<i>Archilochus alexandri</i>		ASDM = AZ Sonoran Desert Museum
<i>Calypte anna</i>		
<i>Calypte costae</i>		ASDM
<i>Selasphorus platycercus</i>		Mountains
<i>Cynanthus latirostris</i>		CCR
<i>Amazilia violiceps</i>		Crystal Cave trail
Rallidae		
<i>Fulica americana</i>		Willcox
Recurvirostridae		
<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>		Willcox
<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>		Willcox
Charadriidae		
<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>		Willcox
Scolopacidae		
<i>Calidris himantopus</i>		Willcox
<i>Calidris bairdii</i>		Willcox
<i>Calidris minutilla</i>		Willcox
<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>		Willcox

Wilson's Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>	Willcox
Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	Willcox
Gulls, Terns & Skimmers	Laridae	
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Willcox
Herons, Egrets & Bitterns	Ardeidae	
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	Willcox
Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Willcox
New World Vultures	Cathartidae	
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	Common
Hawks, Eagles & Kites	Accipitridae	
Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	Tucson area
Gray Hawk	<i>Buteo plagiatus</i>	Near CCR, brief encounter
Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	Grasslands
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	Common
Owls	Strigidae	
Whiskered Screech-Owl	<i>Megascops trichopsis</i>	CCC
Western Screech-Owl	<i>Megascops kennicottii</i>	CCC
Elf Owl	<i>Micrathene whitneyi</i>	CCR
Spotted Owl	<i>Strix occidentalis</i>	Pinery Canyon adult with fledgling Favorite Bird!
Trogon	Trogonidae	
Elegant Trogon	<i>Trogon elegans</i>	South Fork CCC
Woodpeckers	Picidae	
Acorn Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>	CCR
Gila Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i>	Tucson & ASDM
Ladder-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates scalaris</i>	Desert below Portal
Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates villosus</i>	CCC
Arizona Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates arizonae</i>	CCR
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	Mountains
Gilded Flicker	<i>Colaptes chrysoides</i>	Tucson Mountain Park
Falcons & Caracaras	Falconidae	
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	Tucson
Tyrant Flycatchers	Tyrannidae	
Greater Pewee	<i>Contopus pertinax</i>	Rustler Park
Western Wood-Pewee	<i>Contopus sordidulus</i>	Mountains
Cordilleran Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax occidentalis</i>	Turkey Creek
Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	CCR
Say's Phoebe	<i>Sayornis saya</i>	CCR
Vermilion Flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>	Tucson
Dusky-capped Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus tuberculifer</i>	Mountains
Ash-throated Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>	Gate's Pass near Tucson
Brown-crested Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus tyrannulus</i>	CCR
Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher	<i>Myiodynastes luteiventris</i>	CCC
Cassin's Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus vociferans</i>	Willcox
Thick-billed Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus crassirostris</i>	Portal
Western Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	Common

Vireos, Shrike-Babblers & Erpornis

Bell's Vireo
 Plumbeous Vireo
 Warbling Vireo

Shrikes

Loggerhead Shrike

Crows, Jays & Magpies

Steller's Jay
 Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay
 Mexican Jay
 Chihuahuan Raven
 Common Raven

Tits, Chickadees, & Titmice

Mexican Chickadee
 Bridled Titmouse
 Juniper Titmouse

Penduline-Tits

Verdin

Larks

Horned Lark

Swallows

Tree Swallow
 Violet-green Swallow
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow
 Purple Martin
 Barn Swallow
 Cliff Swallow

Long-tailed Tits

Bushtit

Nuthatches

White-breasted Nuthatch
 Pygmy Nuthatch

Treecreepers

Brown Creeper

Gnatcatchers

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher

Wrens

House Wren
 Bewick's Wren

Cactus Wren

Mockingbirds & Thrashers

Curve-billed Thrasher
 Northern Mockingbird

Vireonidae

Vireo bellii
Vireo plumbeus
Vireo gilvus

Laniidae

Lanius ludovicianus

Corvidae

Cyanocitta stelleri
Aphelocoma woodhouseii
Aphelocoma wollweberi
Corvus cryptoleucus
Corvus corax

Paridae

Poecile sclateri
Baeolophus wollweberi
Baeolophus ridgwayi

Remizidae

Auriparus flaviceps

Alaudidae

Eremophila alpestris

Hirundinidae

Tachycineta bicolor
Tachycineta thalassina

Stelgidopteryx serripennis
Progne subis
Hirundo rustica
Petrochelidon pyrrhonota

Aegithalidae

Psaltiriparus minimus

Sittidae

Sitta carolinensis
Sitta pygmaea

Certhiidae

Certhia americana

Poliophtidae

Poliophtila caerulea
Poliophtila melanura

Troglodytidae

Troglodytes aedon
Thryomanes bewickii
Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus

Mimidae

Toxostoma curvirostre
Mimus polyglottos

Heard only near Portal
 Mountains
 Mountains

Rodeo, NM

Mountains
 CCR
 Mountains & CCR
 Grasslands
 CCR and Mountains

Rustler and Barfoot Parks
 CCR & George Walker House
 George Walker House

Common in Desert at CCR

Grasslands on SE of Chiricahuas

Migrants through the grassland
 Mountains

Migrants through the grassland
 ASDM
 Rodeo, NM
 Willow Tank

Mostly heard South Fork CCC

Mountains & CCR
 Barfoot & Rustler Parks

Barfoot Park

South Fork CCC
 Desert below Portal

Common in Mountains
 CCR and oaks in the mountains

ASDM, CCR & desert

ASDM & desert
 Desert

Thrushes & Allies

Western Bluebird
 Hermit Thrush
 American Robin

Silky-flycatchers

Phainopepla

Olive Warbler

Olive Warbler

Old World Sparrows

House Sparrow (l)

Finches, Euphonias & Allies

House Finch
 Lesser Goldfinch

New World Sparrows

Botteri's Sparrow
 Black-throated Sparrow
 Yellow-eyed Junco
 Canyon Towhee
 Abert's Towhee
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow
 Spotted Towhee

Troupials & Allies

Eastern Meadowlark
 Hooded Oriole
 Bullock's Oriole
 Scott's Oriole
 Red-winged Blackbird
 Bronzed Cowbird
 Brown-headed Cowbird
 Great-tailed Grackle

New World Warblers

Lucy's Warbler
 Common Yellowthroat
 Yellow Warbler
 Grace's Warbler
 Painted Redstart

Cardinals & Allies

Hepatic Tanager
 Summer Tanager
 Western Tanager
 Northern Cardinal
 Pyrrhuloxia
 Black-headed Grosbeak
 Blue Grosbeak

Squirrels, Prairie Dogs & Marmots

Harris's Antelope-Squirrel

Turdidae

Sialia mexicana
Catharus guttatus
Turdus migratorius

Ptilionotidae

Phainopepla nitens

Peucedramidae

Peucedramus taeniatus

Passeridae

Passer domesticus

Fringillidae

Haemorhous mexicanus
Spinus psaltria

Passerellidae

Peucaea botterii
Amphispiza bilineata
Junco phaeonotus
Melospiza fusca
Melospiza aberti
Aimophila ruficeps
Pipilo maculatus

Icteridae

Sturnella magna
Icterus cucullatus
Icterus bullockii
Icterus parisorum
Agelaius phoeniceus
Molothrus aeneus
Molothrus ater
Quiscalus mexicanus

Parulidae

Leiostyris luciae
Geothlypis trichas
Setophaga petechia
Setophaga graciae
Myioborus pictus

Cardinalidae

Piranga flava
Piranga rubra
Piranga ludoviciana
Cardinalis cardinalis
Cardinalis sinuatus
Pheucticus melanocephalus
Passerina caerulea

Sciuridae

Ammospermophilus harrisi

Barfoot Rustler junction
 Mountains
 Mountains

ASDM

Rustler Park

Tucson

Common
 ASDM

Grassland below Portal
 ASDM & desert below Portal
 Common in the mountains
 Portal area & CCR
 Tucson & ASDM
 Heard only South Fork CCC
 Common

Lilian's subspecies in the grasslands
 ASDM and most days in the Chiricahuas
 1 sneaked into Dave Jasper's feeder in Portal
 A fine male in South Fork CCC
 Willow Tank
 Rodeo, NM
 A few seen
 Rodeo, NM

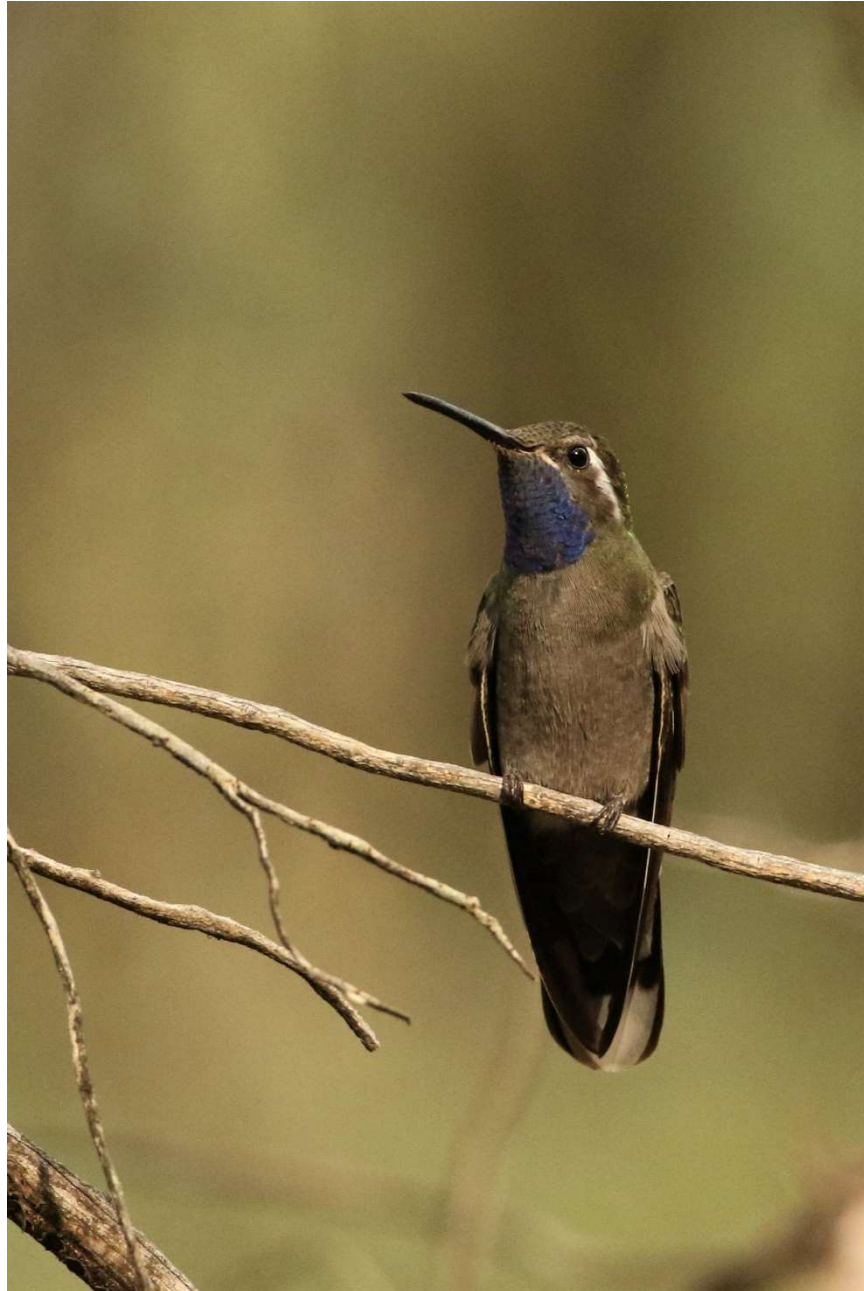
Desert below Portal
 Heard at Willco
 ASDM, by a couple folks
 A fine look at Turkey Creek
 Just a couple seen, affected by drought

Rustler Park and along the road in mountains
 CCR
 CCR
 ASDM
 ASDM & desert below Portal
 CCR
 CCR area

Arizona Gray Squirrel
 Mexican Fox Squirrel
 Cliff Chipmunk
 Rock Squirrel
Kangaroo Rat
 Merriam's Kangaroo Rat
Rats & Mice
 North American Deermouse
Rabbits & Hares
 Desert Cottontail
 Black-tailed Jackrabbit
Cats
 Bobcat
Bears
 American Black Bear
Skunks
 Striped Skunk
Raccoons
 White-nosed Coati
Peccaries
 Collared Peccary
Deer
 White-tailed Deer
 Mule Deer
 Canyon Treefrog
 Bullfrog (I)
 Ornate Bo Turtle
Lizards
 Sonoran Spiny-tailed Iguana (I)
 Zebra-tailed Lizard
 Desert Spiny Lizard
 Clark's Spiny Lizard
 Yarrow's Spiny Lizard
 Striped Plateau Lizard
 Madrean Alligator Lizard
Snakes
 Coachwhip
 Gopher Snake (Bullsnake)
 Black-tailed Rattlesnake

Sciurus arizonensis
Sciurus nayaritensis
Tamias dorsalis
Spermophilus variegatus
Heteromyidae
Dipodomys merriami
Muridae
Peromyscus maniculatus
Leporidae
Sylvilagus audubonii
Lepus californicus
Felidae
Lyn rufus
Ursidae
Ursus americanus
Mephitidae
Mephitis mephitis
Procyonidae
Nasua narica
Tayassuidae
Pecari tajacu
Cervidae
Odocoileus virginianus
Odocoileus hemionus
Hyla arenicolor
Rana catesbeiana
Terrapene ornata
Lacertilia
Ctenosaura macrolopha
Callisaurus draconoides
Sceloporus magister
Sceloporus clarkii
Sceloporus yarrovii
Sceloporus virgatus
Gerrhonotus kingii
Serpentes
Masticophis flagellum
Pituophis catenifer
Crotalus molossus

Martha! At CCR



Blue-throated Mountain-gem © Brian Gibbons