Northern Arizona and the Grand Canyon
May 1 – 10, 2020
Leaders: Rob Gibbs & Tim Weber

Beginning in Phoenix, our ultimate destination is the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, but we will take our time getting there as we explore the tremendous diversity of Central Arizona along the way. As we head north out of Phoenix, we will visit one of the northern most areas of the Sonoran Desert supporting a healthy growth of Saguaro Cactus and other desert species. Continuing North, we will spend a couple of days exploring the well-watered Verde Valley just south of Sedona and home to the annual Verde Valley Birding and Nature Festival. When afternoons begin to heat up we will head for the cool 7,000 ft elevations of Mingus Mountain or the Mogollon Rim of the Colorado plateau to explore the mixed evergreen forests and their bird life. As we travel north past Flagstaff, we’ll visit the San Francisco Peaks which at 12,600 feet are the highest point in the State. Then it’s on to the Grand Canyon to experience the grandeur of what is often considered one of the 7 natural wonders of the world. We’ll spend a couple days exploring its geology and wildlife before returning south to further our examination of the diverse habitats of the Red Rock Country of Sedona and ultimately retrace our route back to Phoenix.

While birds will be the primary focus of our trip, we won’t ignore other elements of natural history. This region is rich with many fascinating reptiles, mammals, butterflies, and wildflowers. Of course, the spectacular geology of the region simply can’t be ignored, and for those who look closely, the signs of early human inhabitants offer yet another story to explore. Popular ANS leader Rob Gibbs leads this trip along with local leader Tim Weber, a professional bird guide who operates “Birding Northern Arizona” birding and outdoor tour company in Sedona, Arizona.

The following day-to-day itinerary represents an outline of the activities planned for the group. Details may be changed by the leaders for any reason deemed to be in the best interest of the group.

Friday, May 1: Phoenix
Our journey begins with flights into Phoenix and overnight at a convenient hotel with free shuttle from the airport. If flight arrivals allow, we will visit some excellent birding spots near the airport including The Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch in Gilbert. This is a 110 acre park that combines state-of-the-art water resource development with wildlife habitat, educational and recreational opportunities. Its 70 acres of water impoundments have yielded a bird list of nearly 300 species. Dinner and overnight in Phoenix.
Saturday, May 2: Travel to Cottonwood
We will get an early start as we head north but we will stop along the way to explore some of the northern most areas of the Sonoran Desert that support healthy populations of saguaro cactus and other desert plants and animals. Possible species include Cactus wren, Curve-billed Thrasher, White-winged Dove, Gambel’s Quail and Phainopepla. As we continue north, we will observe the effects elevation has on the surrounding habitat. Moving up in elevation will take us from saguaro studded desert to grasslands where we may see pronghorn, then through chaparral shrub habitat and into pinyon pine - Juniper woodlands. Our destination is the Verde Valley which is located close to the center of the state between two major physiographic provinces – the Colorado Plateau to the north and the first ridge of the Basin and Range Province. Add to that the Verde River, the last remaining free flowing river in the state and its tributaries and you have an area high in diversity of both plant and animal life. We will spend the next two days exploring the varied habitats of this beautiful area. Overnight at the Tavern Motel in Oldtown Cottonwood.

Sunday, May 3: Cottonwood
We will start our first full day of exploring the Verde Valley area with an optional pre-breakfast bird walk along the Jail Trail located a short walk from our motel along the Verde River. Possible birds include nesting Zone-tailed Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Common Black-hawk, Summer Tanager as well as migrants. After breakfast in old town Cottonwood, we will visit a couple of preserves of the Northern Arizona Audubon Society. Bubbling Ponds Fish Hatchery is located at the base of House Mountain where artesian springs bubble forth to join Oak Creek and bring extra life to the desert. Nesting Common Black-hawks, Bridled Titmouse, Phainopepla, Osprey, and Verdin can be found in the varied habitats along Oak Creek. We will also visit the Sedona Wetlands where migrating and wintering waterfowl and shorebirds utilize its many ponds. We will return to Oldtown for lunch on your own, with time to explore its many shops during the heat of the day. We will head out for a late afternoon excursion to another of the many local birding locations. Dinner and overnight in Oldtown Cottonwood.

Monday May 4: Cottonwood
After our optional early birdwalk and breakfast, we will head out to bird at Dead Horse Ranch State Park just a five-minute ride from our motel. The Park is the host site for the Annual Verde Valley Birding and Nature Festival offering a variety of habitats and birding opportunities. Possibilities include Belted Kingfisher, Bald Eagle, Vermillion Flycatcher, Say’s and Black Phoebes, Bewick’s Wren, Marsh Wren, Red-winged and Brewer’s blackbirds, Anna’s and Black-chinned Hummingbird and waterfowl. In the afternoon, we will travel up to the cooler 7,800 foot elevations on Mingus Mountain to eat box lunches and explore higher elevation habitats including Chaparral, Pinyon-Juniper woodland and Ponderosa Pine forest. Possible species include Stellar’s Jay, Western Tanager, Western Bluebird, Grace’s, Virginia’s, Townsend’s, red-faced and Olive Warblers, Acorn Woodpecker and Band-tailed Pigeon. Dinner and overnight in Cottonwood.
**Tuesday May 5: Grand Canyon**
We will get an early start as we head north to the Grand Canyon and wind our way up through Sedona’s “Red Rock Country” and its famous Oak Creek Canyon. At the top of Oak Creek Canyon we will ascend the edge of the Colorado Plateau known as the Mogollon Rim. We will explore several birding locations along the way including areas around the San Francisco Peaks, which include Humphreys Peak the highest point in Arizona at 12,633 feet. Habitats include Ponderosa Pine forest, and Mixed Conifer Forest. Possible birds include Sharp-shinned Hawk, Williamson’s Sapsucker, Clark’s Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Pine Siskin, warblers and vireos. We will arrive at the Grand Canyon in mid to late afternoon with time for our first view of this amazing natural wonder and a walk along its rim. Dinner and overnight at the Grand Canyon.

**Wednesday May 6: Grand Canyon**
After an optional pre-breakfast birdwalk, we will spend the day exploring and learning about the Grand Canyon, visiting several locations and taking short hikes to look for birds and other life along the south rim. We will also provide free time after lunch to make use of the National Park’s Visitor Center and other educational exhibits. Sunset is a special time at the Canyon and we will be sure to be at a special spot to take in the colors and majesty of that event. Birds we might see include White-throated Swift, California Condor, Peregrine Falcon, Juniper Titmouse, White-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatch, Canyon and Rock Wren, Western Bluebird, Black-throated Gray Warbler and Western Tanager. Dinner and overnight at the Grand Canyon.

**Thursday May 7: Grand Canyon and travel to Sedona**
We will linger for a while after breakfast at the Grand Canyon to give folks a last chance to take in the splendor of this magnificent place and try to see anything we might have missed (i.e., try our best to find a California Condor if we have not seen one). Then we head back south to Sedona to explore more thoroughly the Red Rock Country we had a taste of earlier in the trip. We will break up the drive with a walk to explore a trail or two along the way. In Sedona, we will be sure to have some time to explore its many shops and dine in town. Overnight at Days Inn in the Village of Oak Creek.

**Friday May 8: Sedona**
After our optional early birdwalk and breakfast, we will walk a couple of trails to look for birds and other wildlife in the stunning surroundings that have made Sedona a famous destination. In addition to beautiful landscapes, streams, birds and wildlife, this area is rich in cultural history of the native people who lived here long before Europeans came on the scene. Montezuma Castle and Tuzigoot National Monuments and other local sites preserve ancient dwellings and petroglyphs. We will visit at least one of the many local cultural sites to learn about these early people and their amazing culture while continuing our exploration of the natural history of area. After lunch, we will provide some free time with an optional walk in late afternoon as things cool off and birds get active again. Dinner and overnight at Village of Oak Creek.
Saturday May 9: Sedona and Travel to Phoenix
After our optional early birdwalk and breakfast, we will have plenty of time to continue our exploration of the Sedona/Verde Valley area before heading south. After lunch we will head towards Phoenix stopping along the way to continue our explorations. We have many options and will choose our stops based on species we have not yet seen and/or habitats we have not fully explored. One habitat we may focus on is riparian areas along the many perennial streams (rare habitats in Arizona) that empty into the Verde River South of Sedona in the Verde Valley. We also may have another chance to do a little desert birding as we get near Phoenix. Dinner and overnight in Phoenix.

Sunday May 10
Our journey concludes with transfers to the airport for the return journey home.

Leadership

Rob Gibbs: Rob lives in Cornville, Arizona but grew up in Maryland. He spent his professional career working as a Park Naturalist, Wildlife Ecologist, and Natural Resources Manager for the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Rob has led natural history and birding field trips for over 35 years for various organizations including the Audubon Naturalist Society and the Smithsonian Institution. His most recent trips for ANS include Alaska, Yellowstone National Park, Panama, Cuba, Honduras, California and Southeast Arizona. His life-long passion is learning and teaching others about the natural world.

Tim Weber: Tim grew up on Cape Cod, MA, and earned a BA in Biology from Middlebury College in Vermont. After college, Tim left the east coast behind after discovering that skiing in the Rocky Mountains is performed on powder snow and not rain and ice. He received his unofficial outdoor education in Colorado through years of skiing, mountain biking, hiking and camping. His migration continued west to the Bay Area where he interned for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, hooting for Spotted Owls at night and trapping raptors by day.

Tim earned an MS in Wildlife Management from Humboldt State University, and has spent the last twenty years working as a biologist with the government, private industry, and non-profit organizations. After a decade in Arizona, Tim established his dream job/ tour company, Birding Northern Arizona, and has been working full time to introduce birders to the incredible diversity that Arizona has to offer.