



Pyrrhuloxia  
(part of the  
cardinal family) in  
southern Texas

# *birders'* bucket list

When it comes to birding in North America, these must-see places top the list. *By Stacy Tornio*

A really good vacation offers a temporary escape from the stresses of everyday life. A really *great* vacation? Well, it involves birding.

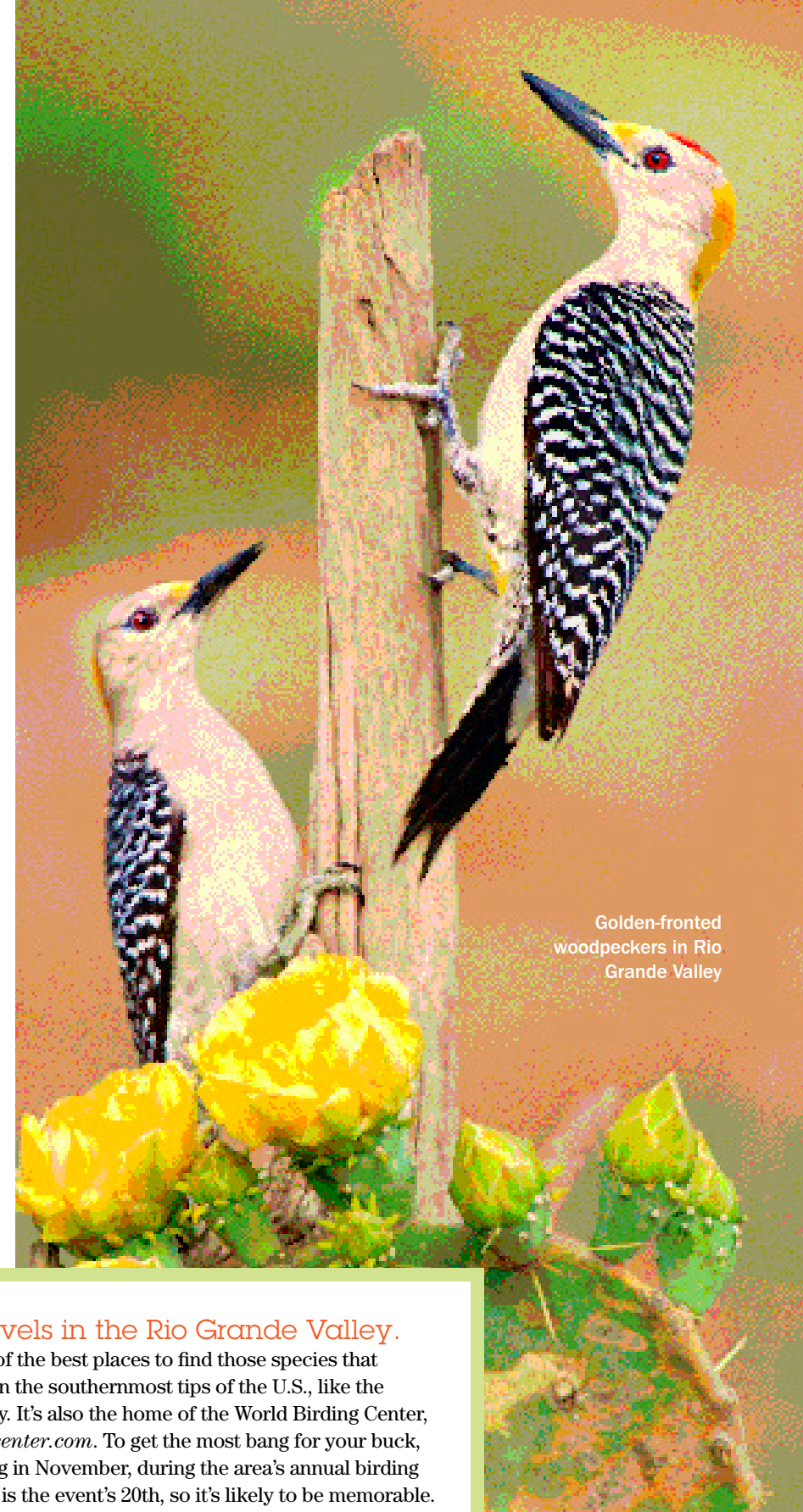
As the editor of *Birds & Blooms*, I get to see a lot of beautiful pictures of birds. But it's a whole other thing to see them in person. That's why, when I travel, I'm always looking for new species. On a recent trip to Arizona, I spotted a pyrrhuloxia for the first time, and I can tell you, finding a new bird is an adventure...and good for the soul, too.

I asked my most knowledgeable birding friends around the country what destinations they thought should be on every birder's "bucket list." While there certainly are outstanding birding locales in all 50 states and across Canada, these top 10 are in a class by themselves. Which one(s) might become a stop for your next trip?



## Unique marvels in the Rio Grande Valley.

The valley is one of the best places to find those species that can be seen only in the southernmost tips of the U.S., like the gorgeous green jay. It's also the home of the World Birding Center, [theworldbirdingcenter.com](http://theworldbirdingcenter.com). To get the most bang for your buck, we suggest visiting in November, during the area's annual birding festival. This year is the event's 20th, so it's likely to be memorable. Learn more at [rgvbf.org](http://rgvbf.org).



Golden-fronted  
woodpeckers in Rio  
Grande Valley

BIRD IMAGES: DAVE WELING





Great egrets in the Everglades

### Florida's k in the Eve

Covering nearly 1 million acres, this fabl is the nation's subtropical wilderness, making it an ideal habitat for manatees, crocodiles, Florida panthers—and, of course, things with wings. Many species winter here, so in addition to all the regulars—anhingas, warblers, flycatchers—it's not hard to find less common visitors like the magnificent frigatebird. Just put “birding in the Everglades” in your search engine, and you'll be delightfully overwhelmed.



Learn about some of the most popular Southwest hummingbird migration spots at [birdsandblooms.com/mag](http://birdsandblooms.com/mag).



### Hummingbirds in southeast Arizona.

Touted as the Hummingbird Capital of the World, the area around Sierra Vista and Ramsey Canyon is where you'll want to focus your quest for rare hummingbirds. Home to an amazing 15 hummer species, it boasts spring and summer regulars like the calliope, rufous and broad-tailed. But during spring and fall migration, which is when we recommend going, you can also see rarities like the white-eared, blue-throated and berylline. Many tour companies and local businesses cater to hummingbird lovers, but we suggest starting your trip planning at [visitsierravista.com](http://visitsierravista.com).



White-eared hummingbird, Arizona



Bird-watchers in Cape May

### Shorebirds in Cape May.

Cape May Bird Observatory is one of the best-known facilities of its kind in North America. You can find activities year-round at Cape May, including the World Series of Birding in May and an autumn birding festival. Located on the southern tip of New Jersey, Cape May is a paradise for lovers of shorebirds. There's hardly a wrong time to visit this hot spot, so start the planning at [birdcapemay.com](http://birdcapemay.com).



### Warblers in northwest Ohio.

Ohio? Really? I thought the same thing, but just one trip made me a believer. While May is the perfect month to look for warblers throughout much of North America, visiting the area around Toledo then gives you a chance to see many different warblers in one place. The area hosts the annual Biggest Week in American Birding festival, where some visitors last year saw a Kirtland's warbler, among the rarest of the rare. Book rooms early, as hotels sell out. Start planning at [biggestweekinamericanbirding.com](http://biggestweekinamericanbirding.com).

**Birds & Blooms** will be at the 2013 Biggest Week in American Birding festival. We hope to see you there!



Kirtland's warbler





Birders on Attu Island



### Rare birds on Alaska's Attu Island.

OK, let's be honest. The weather is horrible, with only a handful of clear days each year. The trip will cost you more than \$7,000. The accommodations aren't exactly luxurious. But the location? Ah, the location. Though technically part of Alaska, Attu is in the Eastern Hemisphere, closer to Russia than to the United States. You may have seen this once-in-a-lifetime trip featured in the 2011 birding movie *The Big Year*. If you go, as the characters in the movie did, you'll see rare and amazing species that other birders in North America can only dream of. Did somebody say whiskered auklet? You'll need to sign up for a tour to get to Attu; get more information at [zbirdtours.com](http://zbirdtours.com).

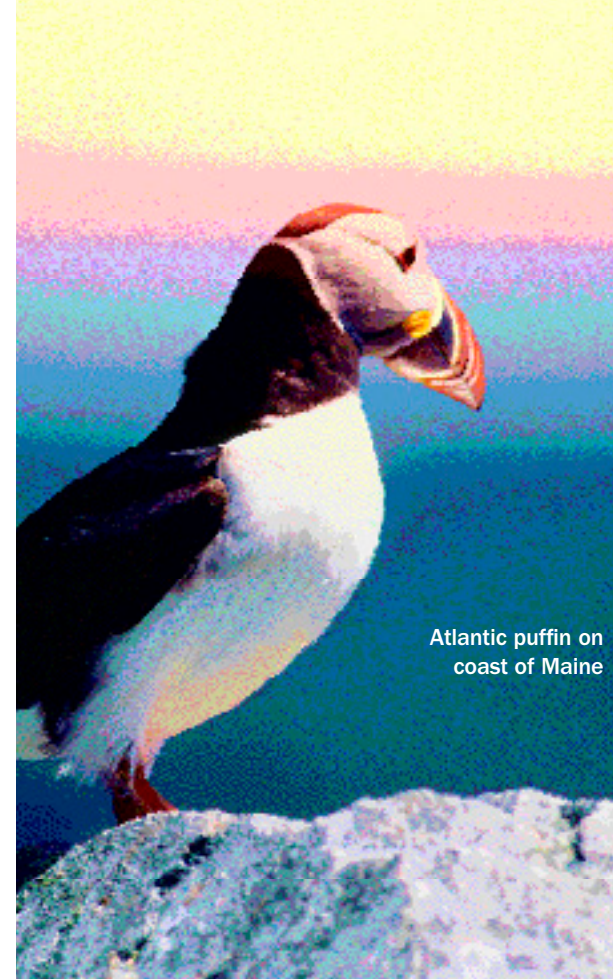


### Sandhill cranes in Nebraska.

You've never seen sandhill cranes until you've seen them like this. Thousands of cranes—80 percent of the world's sandhill population, in fact—descend upon the Platte River in mid- to late March. You'll see plenty of ducks and geese, too. While many places claim to offer excellent crane sightings, Nebraska really does take top honors. Begin your adventure at [nebraskaflyway.com](http://nebraskaflyway.com).

AVOCET, ALL CANADA PHOTOS/ALAMY; ATTU ISLAND, RICK & NORA BOWERS/AC PRODUCTIONS

'I'IWI, FRANK LANTING STUDIO/ALAMY; PUFFIN, JOANNE WILLIAMS/THE IMAGE FINDERS



Atlantic puffin on coast of Maine



### Puffins on the Maine coast.

If you look at a range map, you'll see that Atlantic puffins live mostly at sea, making it a little hard for us land dwellers to spot these unique, bright-beaked birds. But there is a way. In spring and summer, they come ashore to nest and raise their young—though you'll still need to hop on a boat to view them. The thriving puffin population most people go to see is located near Muscongus Bay, Maine. Learn more about the birds and the tour companies that offer trips to see them at [projectpuffin.org](http://projectpuffin.org). And who knows? You just might see some roseate terns, seals or even whales along the way, too!



*Stacy Tornio, the editor of Birds & Blooms, tries to sneak birding into all of her vacations. She currently has her sights set on the Everglades—if she can convince her kids that swamps really are fun.*



### Diversity in Utah.

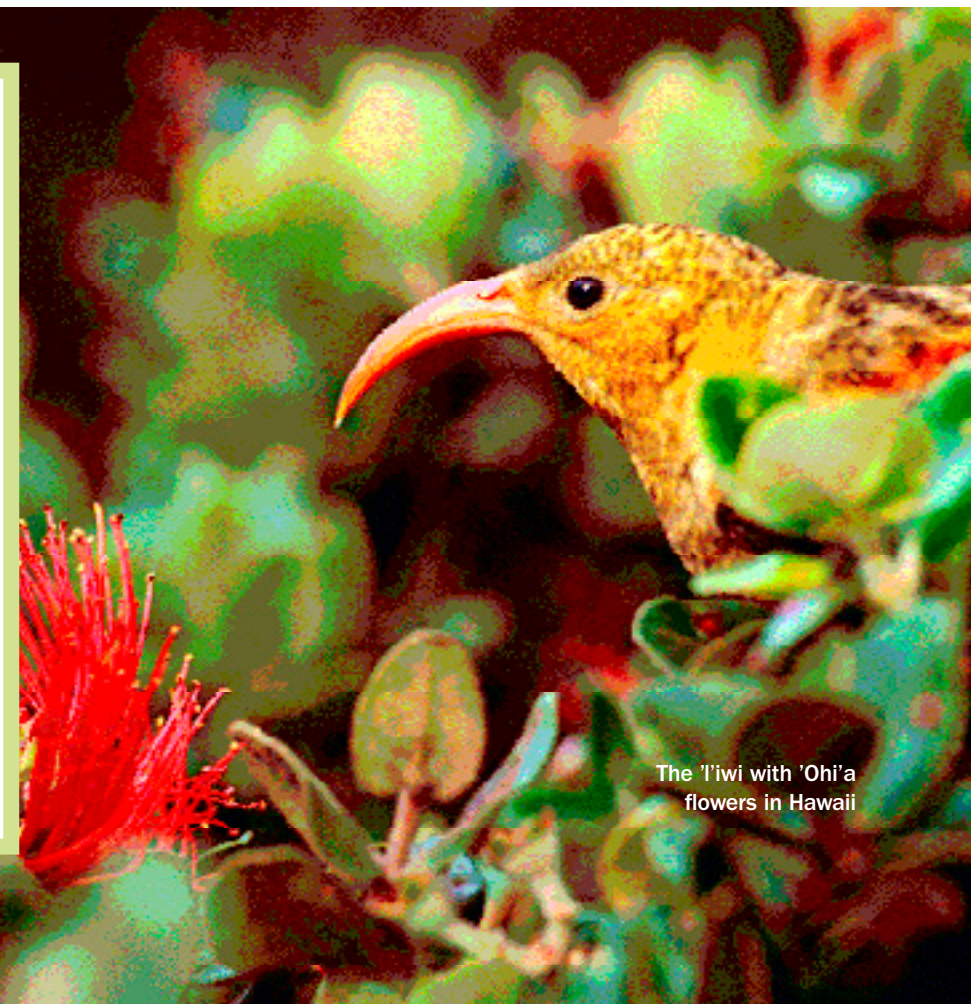
You'll find a spectacular array of habitats here, from subalpine mountain, forest and sage-steppe to upland, wetland and desert. And as you'll learn at [visitutah.com](http://visitutah.com), you can get to them all in the same day! Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in northern Utah, where the Bear River flows into the Great Salt Lake, is a good place to start. Several marshes here are protected, making them prime spots for waterfowl and other western birds. Get more information and see a bird report powered by [ebird.org](http://ebird.org) at [fws.gov/bearriver](http://fws.gov/bearriver).

This American avocet is foraging at Bear River in Utah.



### Uni in Hawaii.

Hawaii is on many bucket lists for all kinds of reasons, but the birding here truly is special. Each island boasts its own wealth of species. A good place to start figuring out what you want to see is [hawaiiiaudubon.com](http://hawaiiiaudubon.com). You can also find lots of independent companies offering birding tours, so do your homework online before you go—and get ready to start checking off tropical beauties like the 'I'iwi from your life list.



The 'I'iwi with 'Ōhi'a flowers in Hawaii