

SOUTHWEST REGION

**/Janet Witzeman, John P. Hubbard and
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The “climate” this fall was mainly one of anticipation — as everyone awaited the arrival of the transplanted Whooping Cranes, destined to winter with their foster-parent Sandhills in central New Mexico. The weather, in the literal sense, was rather ordinary. It seemed to have little ornithological significance for most of the fall. During a spell of bad weather early in September, central Arizona noted several eastern passerines — but since that storm system had come from the north, not the east, its effect (if any) was not clear.

The difficulties in analyzing weather's effect were never more apparent than this fall. Beginning early in the season Arizona recorded many shorebirds with coastal affinities, more than the usual Sabine's and Bonaparte's Gulls and Common Terns, a single very rare **Heermann's Gull**, and multiples of Greater Scaup and Oldsquaw. Both Arizona and New Mexico had **Surf Scoters** and, more notably, the first occurrences of **Black Scoters** in both states. (Records are detailed in the species accounts below). These coastal and pelagic birds arrived randomly over the period from mid-August to mid-November, and no correlations of any kind could be found between their appearances and local weather patterns. It may have been mere coincidence that these scattered records occurred in the same season as the most obvious weather-induced invasion in Arizona birding history, which might be termed:



THE PELAGIC INVASION — Thanksgiving week brought mild weather to central Arizona, with breezes and humidity from the southwest. But on the night of Nov. 27 a major storm front moved in from the northwest, bringing heavy precipitation and, on the morning of the 28th, the highest wind velocities ever registered during November in the Phoenix area. That morning at dawn CS saw a Heermann's Gull fly in from the storm-ridden west and land at a pond near Phoenix. Alerted by phone, led on by flocks of scoters flying over the desert, a group of observers (ST,SM,JT,RW,JW) wound up spending the rest of the day checking all the ponds south and west of Phoenix. By nightfall they had tallied (even allowing for duplication at different ponds) no less than **eight Heermann's Gulls** (only about a dozen previous records for the state), **five Herring Gulls** (rare in central Arizona), two California Gulls (rare in central Arizona), 12 Greater Scaup (rare in Arizona), and **39 Surf Scoters** (casual in Arizona). Of the previous records for Surf Scoter in the state, generally single birds, almost all had been female-plumaged — but 32 of the 39 that day were adult males.

Almost as intriguing as the appearance of these coastal birds was their prompt *disappearance*: by the following day, when the wind had abated, virtually all had left Phoenix. Unfortunately, it seems the ponds at Tucson were not checked on the 28th; on the 29th, HF found two Surf Scoters there, a tantalizing hint of what may have occurred the day of the storm.



Surf Scoter invasion, Phoenix, Ariz., Nov. 28, 1975. Photo/Robert Witzeman.

LOONS THROUGH HERONS — Although the Com. Loon is generally rare in the Southwest, there were reports involving at least 14 — seven each in Arizona and New Mexico, all between late October and the end of the period. Single Horned Grebes were at Nogales Nov. 1-3 (PN,BJo,GG) and at Phoenix Oct. 22 - Nov. 4 (SB,SM,KA), while two remained at Las Cruces throughout November (BP); the species is rather scarce (and probably overlooked to some extent) in the Region. High counts of W. Grebes were 60-70 on Elephant Butte L., N. Mex., Sept. 13-14 (M. Lang), 50 on San Carlos Res., Ariz., Nov. 10 (PN), and 200+ on the Colorado R. at Parker, Ariz., Nov. 27 (BB).

Arizona saw the usual scattered flocks of Cattle Egrets, with numbers decreasing toward the end of the season. In New Mexico there were at least 26 individuals in four counties, including a new northeasternmost record of 11 at Clayton Lake Oct. 3 (A. Krehbiel). The **Louisiana Heron** is an extremely rare straggler in early fall to Arizona from the Gulf of California; incredible (but proven by photos) was one that appeared Nov. 2 at a lake at 7000 ft. in the mountains near Flagstaff (C. Beals).

WATERFOWL — Ross' Goose is quite uncommon in the Region away from its areas of regular occurrence in the Pecos, Rio Grande, and Lower Colorado River valleys. Single birds were reported from three localities in s.c. Arizona this fall: Nogales, Nov. 16 (PN), Willcox, Nov. 21-22 (DD *et al.*), and Arivaca Jct., Nov. 23 (PM,ER). With more observers watching for them, there were more reports of Greater Scaup in Arizona than in any previous season. Aside from those that appeared at Phoenix during the storm of Nov. 28, reports involved at least seven individuals at four s.c. Arizona localities, beginning Nov. 1 and extending into December (PN *et al.*). Most of these reports were considered probably to be correct. Single **Oldsquaws** in s.c. Arizona, not apparently connected with any storm activity, were at Willcox Nov. 1 (PN) and at Nogales from Nov. 16 through the end of the period (PN *et al.*).

The biggest news among the Anatidae involved the first confirmed records of **Black Scoter** in both New Mexico and Arizona. On Oct. 28 two were seen and one collected (* to Smithsonian) at Bosque del Apache

N.W.R., N. Mex. (GRZ); there had been one previous hypothetical record for the state. On Nov. 3 one appeared at the Tucson sewage ponds (PN), establishing the first sight record for Arizona. This individual remained only through Nov. 4 (m.ob.), but on the latter date there were also *two* on the ponds at Phoenix (SD,HL). These two were joined by a third on Nov. 5, and the three remained at Phoenix through Nov. 11; photographs (JW) confirmed the record. The occurrence of six individuals at three widely separated points in the space of a week would seem to be more than coincidence, but no explanations were apparent. There were also an unusual number of **Surf Scoter** reports preceding the Nov. 28 invasion: one s. of Phoenix Oct. 26 (RBr), five at Sierra Vista, Ariz., Nov. 1 (PN), and two in San Luis Pass, extreme s.w. New Mexico, Nov. 9 (JPH,CGS); the species has been only casual in both states. All of these Black and Surf Scoters, incidentally were \emptyset plumaged (females or immatures).

In a category by themselves are the waterfowl records from Davis Dam, on the Colorado R. at the Arizona/Nevada border — that is the locality where Arizona's first Barrow's Goldeneyes (57 of them!) were recorded last winter (*Am. Birds* 29: 721,725). This fall, C.S. Lawson visited Davis Dam Nov. 28 and found 14 Barrow's Goldeneyes, two Oldsquaw, one White-winged Scoter and three Surf Scoters. The storm activity that prevailed on the 28th may have had little to do with the presence of these birds; the goldeneyes and Oldsquaw at least were still present a month later.

RAPTORS — Preliminary investigations directed by Murray Hansen and Bob Norton turned up the first evidence of regular concentration points for migrating raptors in Arizona. On Sept. 20 Norton counted 96 hawks, mostly accipiters, moving past Mt. Ord in the Mazatzals east of Phoenix. Where the hawks go from there is a mystery; no similar concentrations were noted farther south.

GALLIFORMES — Montezuma Quail were in high numbers in s.e. Arizona and s.w. New Mexico, particularly in the Silver City area, where birds were even seen twice within city limits (DAZ). On Nov. 15, some 25-30 Chukars were seen (APN *et al.*) near Farmington, where there are no recent reports or introductions of which we are aware.

CRANES — To reiterate briefly for those who have not heard: last summer, 14 Whooping Crane eggs were taken from Canada to Idaho and placed in the nests of Sandhill Cranes at Gray's Lake N.W.R., in an attempt to start a second population of Whoopers. This ambitious experiment may not have aroused much excitement elsewhere (e.g., it was not even mentioned in last summer's "Changing Seasons" writeup — *Am. Birds*, Oct. 1975), but anticipation ran high in the Southwest, because color-marking projects had shown that the selected foster-parent Sandhills wintered in the Rio Grande Valley of c. New Mexico. Of the six Whoopers known to have been reared in Idaho, four had been accounted for in New Mexico by the end of the period. Their arrival dates: Oct. 25 — first at Bosque del Apache N.W.R.; Nov. 11 — one at Bernardo State

Game Refuge; Nov. 12 — one east of Los Lunas; Nov. 29 — second at Bosque.

List-conscious birders pondered the question whether these 'introduced' birds would be 'countable.' Concerned biologists wondered whether the fostered young would succeed in establishing a new population of Whooping Cranes. But no one could question the excitement value of having free-flying Whoopers in the Southwest, and observers flocked to Bosque, where Refuge personnel set up a program to show off the birds without causing them undue disturbance. Aside from one unsatisfactory sighting in 1965, the Whooping Crane was known (previous to this autumn) in the area that is now New Mexico only by a vague reference in the early 1850s.

GALLINULES — An ad. **Purple Gallinule** was present 30 mi. s. of Tucson Aug. 17 - Sept. 5 (PM,ER, m.ob.). The species occasionally strays north into s.c. Arizona and s.e. New Mexico — probably from separate populations in the Pacific lowlands of Mexico and the Texas-Gulf region, respectively; this seems to be the first confirmed Arizona record since 1951.

SHOREBIRDS — Previous to this autumn there have been few records of migrant shorebirds in that area of New Mexico lying west of the Rio Grande and south of the San Juan Valley. However, this season hundreds of waders were present at Blackrock L., on the Zuni Reservation, Aug. 26 (JPH,MCC), and at the Lordsburg Playa in late September and early October; possibly it is habitat and observers, not shorebirds, that have been scarce in the past. In Arizona, many species recorded this fall were considered accidental a decade ago — but note that *all* reported sightings of the less common shorebirds in Arizona this season were made at artificial habitat (mainly sewage ponds) accessible to centers of birding activity. It appears that most shorebird species are capable of overflying the whole Southwest, and that they come down from the sky only where suitable habitat presents itself.

Single Am. Golden Plovers appeared at Phoenix Aug. 27 - Sept. 7 (ST *et al.*), near Willcox Oct. 7 (GM), and Phoenix Oct. 18 - Nov. 15 (SH *et al.*), the first Phoenix bird provided the state's earliest fall record. A **Ruddy Turnstone** at Sierra Vista Sept. 6-11 (PN *et al.*) was only the third Arizona record, but the fourth turned up just one day later, Sept. 7-9 at Phoenix (RN,DD, m.ob.). An Upland Sandpiper was noted near Artesia Sept. 6 (MW) and five were at Jal Sept. 19 (P. Pache); both localities are on the plains of extreme e. New Mexico, the only part of the Region where this species is at all regular. Single Red Knots, rare in Arizona, were s. of Phoenix Aug. 31 - Sept. 7 (RBo *et al.*), at Phoenix Sept. 6-7 (RBr *et al.*), and at Willcox Sept. 10 (PN). Sanderlings, formerly considered casual away from the Colorado R., made a good showing with ten at five locations in s.c. Arizona Aug. 27 - Sept. 28, plus one at Bitter Lake N.W.R., N. Mex., Sept. 3 (BWS). Northern Phalaropes came through in good numbers, with flocks noted at Phoenix and Willcox Sept. 10, two at Tucson Sept. 13, and one at Nogales Sept. 21 (all by PN); one was on the Lordsburg Playa, N. Mex., Oct. 8 (WSpf), and one was at Tucson the day after the heavy weather, Nov. 29 (HF).

GULLS — New Mexico's second record and specimen to Smithsonian — identity confirmed by Dr. J. R. Jehl, Jr., of **Thayer's Gull** was a juv. ♀ obtained near Hatch, Dona Ana Co., Oct. 28 (GS); the first record was an imm. ♀ taken at Caballo L., Jan. 7, 1973. Though traditionally thought of as an offshore migrant, Sabine's Gull is a rare-but-regular fall transient in the interior Southwest; Arizona has had one per autumn for the last five years. This fall the Region had four, all immatures: one at Morgan Lake, extreme n.w. New Mexico, Sept. 13-28 (APN *et al.*), two at Nogales Sept. 21 (PN), and one south of Phoenix Sept. 24 (RBr). As if to presage the invasion of Nov. 28 (see introduction), a single imm. Heermann's Gull appeared at Picacho Res., Ariz., Oct. 11 (RBo).

CUCKOOS, SWIFTS — An apparent **Groove-billed Ani** was photographed at Bosque del Apache N.W.R., Oct. 12 (L. Ditto), marking the second autumn in a row that an ani has been reported in the Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico. A report of two Chimney Swifts in Tucson Aug. 29 (B. Russell) adds to the series of probably reliable sight records in Arizona — there have been four such since May 1973; the only confirmed record involves a pair present in Tucson May-June 1952, which was eventually collected. The species could be of annual occurrence in Arizona, as it has proven to be recently in California.

HUMMINGBIRDS — Anna's Hummingbird, a recent invader to New Mexico, continued to be reported; single ad. males were at Silver City Aug. 18 (M. Mosely) and Nov. 4 (DAZ). Previous northernmost records for Violet-crowned Hummingbird have been at Tucson, where one was present Nov. 1970 to Feb. 1971 and another was seen in Oct. 1972. This fall one was present Oct. 11-19 about 200 mi. farther north, at Prescott, Ariz. (photos — V. Miller); evidently autumn is the time to look for this species north of its usual range. Another out-of-range hummer this fall was a ♂ Rivoli's at Pleasanton, Catron Co., N. Mex., Aug. 11 - Sept. 13 (L. Sumner). A ♂ White-eared Hummingbird at feeders at Portal, Ariz., Oct. 5-16 (SSpf) was about a month later than any previous record.

WOODPECKERS — Examples of yellow-shafted Com. Flickers were reported from Silver City (one on Oct. 28 — O'Byrnes, *vide* DAZ) and from Phoenix, where careful checking revealed up to five during October and November (ST, DStj *et al.*). Specimen records from the past have established that this form is a sparse but regular transient in Arizona, and that "pure" yellow-shafted birds are more frequent than examples from the broad hybrid zone of the w. Great Plains. Single Downy Woodpeckers at Silver City Oct. 30 (DAZ) and at nearby Ft. Bayard Nov. 2 (B. Hayward) were at unusually low elevations and at the southern limit of the species' range. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker of the eastern form (*S.v. varius*) was collected in the Peloncillo Mts., s.w. New Mexico, Nov. 10 (JPH), for one of the few verified state records. This form — which may be a separate species from the red-naped form of the Rockies (*S.v. nuchalis*) — is known to winter in small numbers in s.c. Arizona; observers should watch for it elsewhere. (For details on identification, see Devillers, 1970. *Calif. Birds* 1: 47-76).

FLYCATCHERS — There were several reports of late-lingering kingbirds. A Thick-billed near Patagonia L., Sept. 30 (GM) provided a late record for Arizona; in New Mexico, late Westerns were one at Evans Lake near Silver City Oct. 25 (RAF) and two at Bosque Refuge Nov. 14 (J. Durrie). A single Cassin's Kingbird at San Luis Pass, s.w. New Mexico, Oct. 25 (JPH) was late but not as unusual. A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was near Tombstone, Ariz., Sept. 24 - Oct. 5 (J. Marvin; photos — DD). This species now seems to turn up once or twice every year in Arizona, occurring any time between April and October. Records of E. Phoebe, scarce in the Region, were singles at Roswell Aug. 23 (MW), near Nogales Aug. 23 (PN, PBu), near Phoenix Oct. 24 (ST, JW), La Joya State Game Refuge near Socorro, N. Mex., Oct. 27 (OVB), and Arivaca Jct., Ariz., Nov. 1 (BH).

CORVIDS — Single Blue Jays, uncommon and irregular in s. New Mexico, strayed west to Rattlesnake Springs, Carlsbad N.P., Oct. 24 (BZ, KZ), and near Las Cruces Nov. 13 (R. Moffit, *vide* BP). As predicted by Dr. Russell Balda, Arizona's premier Piñon Jay authority, the general failure of the piñon-pine cone crop in n. Arizona and New Mexico touched off a major southward movement of these jays. This was most noticeable in the Silver City area, where numerous flocks were present throughout the fall (3000 in one flock Oct. 4 — BZ, KZ), some even moving out onto the desert-grassland near Hurley (DAZ). Other southward reports of Piñon Jays included 66 s. of Bowie, Ariz., Sept. 20 (SMR) and 80 near Sasabe, Sonora, Nov. 11 (SMR, GM), the latter being notable since there are few records for Sonora.

WRENS THROUGH THRUSHES — Winter Wrens, formerly considered rare in the Region, appeared in good numbers last winter, and there were indications that this season might produce even more records; by early December at least eight had already been reported from five Arizona locations. The first of these — found frequenting the ornamental plantings around a house in the desert n. of Phoenix, Sept. 21-26 (E. Radke, SD, JW) — was by two weeks the earliest fall record for Arizona. Although the Gray Catbird nests locally in both New Mexico and Arizona, autumn records of migrants are infrequent. Singles were reported this fall at Phoenix Oct. 7 (D. Burch, BB), at Tucson Nov. 5-9 (J. Huffman, GM), and at Las Vegas, N. Mex., on the late dates of Nov. 19-23 (WH). A Brown Thrasher at Pipe Springs Nat'l. Mon., Sept. 28 (SH), was the second record from extreme n. Arizona. A Bendire's Thrasher south of Farmington Sept. 6 (A. & G. Williams, *vide* APN) was near the species' northern limits in New Mexico.

Rufous-backed Robins appeared notably early, with at least four in Arizona by Oct. 29 (arrival/discovery dates generally have been in November or December). Seven had been noted by Nov. 27, exceeding the total reports for all of last winter.

KINGLETS THROUGH STARLINGS — For the second autumn in a row Golden-crowned Kinglets moved into the Arizona lowlands, where they are irregular. A total of eight was found in two locations near Phoenix (ST); exceptional was one banded far from the

mountains at Yuma, Oct. 26 (SSpt). The only Bohemian Waxwings reported were two at Cedar Crest, N. Mex., Nov. 16-19 (J. Sollenberger). Phainopepla are generally rare in s.e. New Mexico; three seen during mid-November in the Guadalupe Mts. (KG) were among the few records for that range. An ad. N. Shrike was seen Nov. 27 at Los Alamos, N. Mex. (B. Lewis); the species is a very sparse winter visitant in the n. parts of the Region. A flock of 200+ Starlings was found at a roost above 7000 ft. at Centerfire Bog, Catron Co., N. Mex., where young were apparently raised in ponderosa pine stands.

VIREOS — Convincing details backed up a **White-eyed Vireo** at Phoenix Nov. 16 (DSjt). There is only one good previous sight record for the state, but note that it was at the same time of year: Nov. 13, 1966, e. of Tucson. A Red-eyed Vireo at Roswell Sept. 9 (MW) was the only report received for this rare migrant.

WARBLERS — There were a number of interesting isolated records in the class of e. vagrant warblers. Single Tennessee Warblers, rare in the Region, were at Socorro Sept. 8-9 (PBA) and Phoenix Oct. 5 (ST). A Magnolia Warbler (casual in Arizona) was at Phoenix Sept. 5 (SD). At Silver City, where the first specimen of **Cape May Warbler** for New Mexico was obtained last year on Oct. 4, an ad. male was seen this year on Oct. 14 (DAZ,MZ). A ♂ **Blackburnian Warbler** at Phoenix Sept. 28 (ST) represented only the second sight record for Arizona. A ♂ Hooded Warbler was at Roswell Sept. 10 (MW) and another was tentatively identified at Phoenix Sept. 5 (RBr); the species is generally considered quite rare in the Southwest, but there have been at least four reports this year. Finally, a **Canada Warbler** in Sabino Canyon near Tucson Sept. 6-7 (C. Kangas, PN,DSzt) was only the second record for Arizona.

Arizona has enjoyed a recent inexplicable abundance of Chestnut-sided and Black-throated Blue Warblers. Both of these "casual" species appeared more often this season than the "uncommon but regular" N. Parula. Arizona Black-throated Blues this fall were singles at Montezuma Castle Nat'l. Mon., Oct. 6 (B. Monroe), Baboquivari Mts., Oct. 22-23 (D. Ellis), Tucson, Oct. 25 - Nov. 11 (WD *et al.*), and two other individuals in the Tucson area Nov. 11 (DSzt, M&DK,JV *et al.*). A sixth Black-throated Blue was just south of the border near Sonoita, Sonora, Oct. 17 (R. Wilt). Chestnut-sided Warblers in Arizona this fall were singles at Phoenix Sept. 24 (ST), Pinaleno Mts., *Oct. 8 (GM), Tucson Oct. 15 (GM), and Portal Oct. 19 (SSpf). Another was at Estancia, c. N. Mex., Oct. 25 (RLT *et al.*).

Three N. Parulas were recorded in Arizona — an imm. male near Phoenix Oct. 5 (ST), one at Tucson Oct. 25-27 (GG,RS), and a male at Portal Nov. 28 (WSpf,SSpf). One in New Mexico (where the species is not recorded so regularly) was an immature at Evans L., Oct. 4 (BZ,KZ). Another e. warbler being found more often recently in Arizona is the Ovenbird. One was at Portal Oct. 6 (D. Bogle) and another was at Phoenix Oct. 8 (RN,BB). Five individual Black-and-white Warblers, five Northern Waterthrushes and eight Am. Redstarts were reported in Arizona — not unusual

for these regular transients.

Intriguing, especially considering the recent Texas records, was a report of a Rufous-capped Warbler Sept. 13 at Arroyo Cajon Bonito, Sonora (DD *et al.*). This locality is only five mi. s. of the border; there are no records yet for Arizona or New Mexico.

ICTERIDS, TANAGERS — A Bobolink was observed Sept. 27 in the grasslands at Davis Pond, the first record for s.e. Arizona (DD). The species has been noted as a sparse fall transient in w. Arizona, perhaps from scattered breeding colonies in the Great Basin. An Orchard Oriole was observed Oct. 2 at Phoenix (ST), providing another record for a species that is possibly overlooked to some extent in the Region. The "**Baltimore**" Oriole, previously known in New Mexico by only two recent records, was observed in the Clayton area: an ad. male Sept. 21 and possibly also Sept. 16 (Wes Cook). A late report was received from the same observer of a Baltimore male at a nest in the area during the past summer. These birds as described were well-distinguished from the Bullock's form; past specimen records from slightly farther east indicate that most N. Orioles there are intergrades between the two forms.

A Scarlet Tanager (probably an ad. male in winter plumage) at Tucson Nov. 2-5 (DSzt,PN,GM) provided about the fifth Arizona record.

FRINGILLIDS — A ♂ Cardinal at Bosque del Apache N.W.R., Sept. 13 (*vide* RLT) was definitely out of range, since the nearest area of regular occurrence for the species is in the Gila Valley. Rose-breasted Grosbeak reports in Arizona numbered eight, the latest being one at Flagstaff Nov. 23 (RPB); apparently the only New Mexico report was one at Silver City Nov. 4-9 (DAZ,MZ). A Dickcissel was picked up dead in Tucson Sept. 4, and another seen alive there the next day (SMR); one at Phoenix Sept. 16 (SB) provided the first local record. The species is generally a scarce fall transient in the state. Two imm. Am. Goldfinches at Silver City Aug. 23 (DAZ) were exceptionally early arrivals. The presence of immatures on this date might be considered suggestive, since the species is known to nest in mid- to late summer; however, there are still no nesting records of the bird in New Mexico or Arizona. A Lark Sparrow seen Oct. 31 amid the coniferous forest at La Cueva, N. Mex. (MBS), was an indication that the species may wander to higher elevations during migration. At Shiprock, extreme n.w. New Mexico, a junco seen Nov. 26 (WSt) had two white wingbars but not the large size and pale coloration typical of the White-winged (Dark-eyed) Junco; it was perhaps an aberrant Slate-colored. Authentic White-winged Juncos were collected at several points in n.c. Arizona during the winter of 1936-37, but aside from that unexplained incursion this form has been recorded from the Region only in n. New Mexico. Reliable western reports of Clay-colored Sparrows were singles at Sabino Canyon near Tucson Sept. 8 (GM) and near Phoenix Nov. 27 (ST); this species could be regular in small numbers, as some winter normally in w. Mexico.

In October and November, longspurs abounded in the s. Animas Valley of New Mexico's southwest corner. Random netting at a waterhole near Cloverdale Nov.

8-12 (JPH) yielded the following: 72 Chestnut-collareds, three McCown's, and one **Lapland Longspur**. Although McCown's Longspur wintered abundantly in the Southwest some decades ago they have become rather rare recently, and the 24:1 ratio of Chestnut-collared to McCown's reflects this. The Lapland Longspur is also rarely recorded in the Region; this represents only the third verified record for New Mexico, and the first in the s.w. section of the state.

CORRIGENDUM — The report of Spotted Owls found at two locations below Silver City, N. Mex. this past spring was an error (*Am. Birds* 29:892).

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