

SOUTHWEST REGION

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Precipitation set records in the western parts of the Region during late winter / early spring 1978; some localities received amounts of rainfall exceeding their normal annual averages before the first of March. As a result, the Arizona deserts put on a wildflower display



seldom rivaled in recent history, and the grasslands turned lush and green months before the summer rains. The most noticeable reaction to these conditions was staged by the Cassin's Sparrows (as detailed below in the species accounts) but it was felt that most spring breeders in the lowlands enjoyed successful nesting seasons.

Many observers felt that the spring migration was quite poor, with some normally common passerines occurring in greatly reduced numbers. The abundance of green vegetation probably contributed to this impression: rather than concentrating in a few riparian "migrant traps," the birds were able to disperse over much wider areas.

LOONS THROUGH HERONS—Excellent photos of a Red-throated Loon on L. Havasu Mar. 29–Apr. 2 (KVR *et al.*) provided the first documentation of the species' occurrence in Arizona; there were two

previous sight records for the Lower Colorado Valley, (hereafter, L.C.V.).

Olivaceous Cormorants continued to occur in the Region, with singles seen Apr. 21 at Las Cruces (KJZ), and May 6 near Cliff, N. Mex., where rare (MZ *et al.*); in Arizona, two were e. of Douglas throughout March (†DD, JBI *et al.*), one was n. of Douglas Apr. 14 (W&SS), and four were on L. Patagonia May 4 and subsequently (KK, GR *et al.*).

There are two definite nesting areas of Great Blue Heron in New Mexico: the Gila R. population continues to maintain itself (RAF), but the one near Watrous had only one nesting pair in May (WH). A Little Blue Heron near Alamogordo Apr. 29 and two there May 16 (K. Haenke *et al.*) provided the first local records. Four Cattle Egrets seen e. of Sonoita Mar. 22 (K. & J. Olson) added to the growing number of records for s.e. Arizona where the species was, until recently, considered rare. Single Louisiana Herons, rare stragglers to the Region, appeared at Bitter Lake N.W.R., May 8-9 (VLG) and at Willcox May 27–June 3 (DD, †ph.GB *et al.*). At Martinez L., near Yuma, several Am. Bitterns which were calling in May and remained at least into June were strongly suspected of nesting (KVR, SF); the species is not currently known to breed in Arizona.

WATERFOWL, RAPTORS—A (Black) Brant was found Apr. 14 on the Lower Colorado River n. of Ehrenberg (ph., KVR); there are now about half a dozen Arizona records. Another report of the species in the L.C.V., previously unpublished, was of one at Havasu N.W.R., Apr. 14, 1975 (B. Delaney, L. Walters, *vide* KVR).

Aerial and ground surveys terminating in March indicated that at least 358 Bald Eagles were present in New Mexico during the winter of 1977-78. This was the first statewide census ever undertaken here (JPH *et al.*). The migration of Swainson's Hawks through Arizona occurs chiefly in April, so a flock of 67 s.e. of Willcox May 28 (R&JW) was extremely late. Also quite late was a ♀ Merlin apparently of the pale race *richardsoni* which remained at Willcox until May 1 (KK, GR).

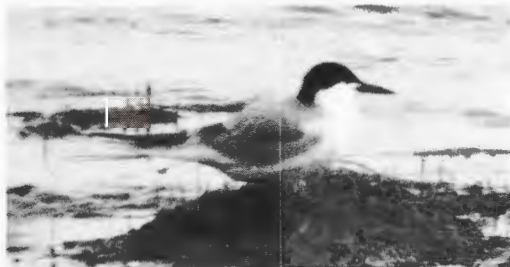
RAILS, SHOREBIRDS—Downy young Virginia Rails found in the B.W. Delta March 29 represented

the first confirmed breeding record for that area. Virginia rails are believed to be breeding commonly now on the Colorado R., from Imperial Dam to Topock (KVR). A Sora found near the Phantom Ranch May 12 (S. Stockton *et al.*, *vide* BB) was the first to be recorded in the Grand Canyon.

An Am. Golden Plover was photographed s. of Parker May 6 (KVR); Arizona had only three previous spring records. A Whimbrel, always a rare transient in Arizona, was photographed at Nogales Apr. 16 (P.A. Buckley) and another or the same was seen there May 6 (CM,†BH *et al.*). Three Upland Sandpipers, rare in spring in New Mexico, were seen just e. of Tucumcari Apr. 10 (KJZ). Six Red Knots near Alamogordo May 20 (LM *et al.*) provided the first spring record for New Mexico as well as the westernmost state record. Arizona's first definite spring records for Pectoral Sandpiper were established at Willcox, with two birds Apr. 8 and one May 1-8 (DSz,†KK,GB *et al.*). Baird's Sandpiper continued its series of spring occurrences at Willcox with one Apr. 30 (DSz *et al.*). Reports of Marbled Godwits in w. New Mexico were more frequent than usual, including two near Redrock May 6 (JR *et al.*) and one at Alamogordo May 15 (LB, *vide* LM). Sanderlings are becoming regular at Willcox in spring. Between one and three were there Apr. 28 – May 15 (DSz,GB *et al.*). A Red Phalarope on L. Havasu Apr. 2 (EC *et al.*) provided one of Arizona's few spring records.

TERNS, DOVES — A Com. Tern was studied at Nogales May 6 for Arizona's first believable spring record.

ASTOUNDING if true was the report of two Roseate Terns seen e. of Roswell, N. Mex., Apr. 21 (VLG). One was photographed w. of there May 1 (Phelps White); the details and photographic evidence are still under study. Although this species is nearly cosmopolitan, it is virtually unknown inland; and on the Texas coast, its nearest point of previous occurrence, it is extremely rare.



Possible Roseate Tern. Phelps White Ranch, Chaves County, N.M., May 1, 1978. Photo/ Phelps White.

Ground Doves are infrequently reported in the Gila Valley, so notable were four near Cliff May 6 (CA *et al.*), and three at Redrock Apr. 29 (RAF).

NIGHTJARS, HUMMINGBIRDS, TROGONS — Totally unexpected was the discovery of a Buff-collared Nightjar (*Caprimulgus ridgwayi*) May 19 in

the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mts., n. of Tucson (CH,ELS). The bird was seen and heard in the area as late as June 20 (m.ob.), and was evidently on territory. This record, more than 120 mi from Guadalupe Canyon, the area of the only previous U.S. records, suggests that a few pairs might occur undetected in many areas of s.e. Arizona.

A Whip-poor-will in the Cook Range, Luna Co., May 23 (JPH) provided a new locality record for the species in New Mexico.

A ♂ Lucifer Hummingbird was present at Portal from Apr. 15 at least to May 26 (SS *et al.*); the species is rapidly becoming regular in s.e. Arizona. Costa's Hummingbird, first verified for New Mexico in Guadalupe Canyon last May (AB 31:1033), was found there again this year on May 6-7. At least ten birds were present (including six ad. males); several were banded, and a probable nest was found (W. Baltosser). Recent White-eared Hummingbirds in Arizona have generally stayed a few days at most, so the male that remained at Ramsey Canyon feeders Apr. 23 at least through June (C&JP,RH. m.ob.) provided a welcome change.

A ♂ Coppery-tailed Trogon seen May 23 in the Animas Mts. (S. Dubrot) provided only the second record for that range and the third for New Mexico.

FLYCATCHERS, MARTINS — A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was noted May 18 near Yuma (RN); Arizona now records one or two individuals every year.

Problematical was the status of a Great Kiskadee at Tucson Mar. 15-29 (M. Sheldrick, †WD *et al.*); if accepted as wild, it would represent Arizona's first record. The species occurs as near as Guaymas, Sonora where it is apparently a permanent resident. It should be noted that the Tucson individual was quite wary and showed no abnormal feather wear; and although it was on the edge of residential Tucson, it was also in a natural "vagrant trap" situation, lower Sabino Canyon. The species is not often seen in captivity in Mexico.

A pair of Olivaceous Flycatchers present at least May 19-31 n.e. of Payson, Ariz., was n. of the species' known breeding range (ST *et al.*). An E. Phoebe was observed s.w. of Springerville, Ariz., May 19-26 (ST,GR *et al.*). Previous records of this uncommon transient in the state have been in fall and winter. A Coues' Flycatcher was seen May 6 on the w. fork of the Gila R., an area of New Mexico for which there are few records (BJH, B.Rogers). A first record for extreme n.w. New Mexico was established by a ♀ Vermilion Flycatcher at Farmington Apr. 8 (APN).

Unusual were three Purple Martins e. of the Sandia Mts., May 20 (RLT) for the first local record, and 17 near Redrock, N. Mex., May 6 (JR *et al.*).

NUTHATCHES, THRASHERS, THRUSHES — A Pygmy Nuthatch in the Cook Range Apr. 24 (JPH) was out of range.

Westward Brown Thrashers in New Mexico were singles May 6 at Evans L., and Redrock (RAF *et al.*); a late individual was at Alamogordo May 20 (LB, *vide* LM). The last report of the winter's Varied Thrush invasion was of one "very weak and ragged" bird in the B.W. Delta Apr. 11 (BE). A Wood Thrush reported at Las Vegas May 18 (WH) was Mexico's fourth.

S.A.

Incredibly, two **Aztec Thrushes** (*Ridgwayia pinicola*) occurred, providing Arizona's first records: one in Madera Canyon, Santa Rita Mts., May 20 (†MLB,AH) and one in Huachuca Canyon, Huachuca Mts., May 30 – June 14 (†DD,†GB *et al.*; ph. GB,CMcM,PO). These two individuals were respectively brownish and blackish — theoretically female and male, although final conclusions will have to await examination of a good museum series. The occurrence of these two individuals so soon after the first U.S. record (last August in Texas — AB 32: 156-157) suggests that this endemic of the Mexican mountain forests may have irregular low-density "invasion" movements, reminiscent of those of the related Varied Thrush.



Aztec Thrush, Huachuca Canyon, Ft. Huachuca, Arizona, May 31, 1978. Photo/ George Beringer.

GNATCATCHERS THROUGH VIREOS — Peripheral reports of Black-tailed Gnatcatchers seemed unusually numerous. In New Mexico these included Apr. 23 in the Mimbres Valley, Apr. 23-24 in the Cook Range, Apr. 9 near Alamogordo, and Apr. 9 near Loco Hills (first definite record for the Southeast — *JPH); and in Arizona, one s. of Grand Canyon Village May 15 (KK *et al.*). A Phainopepla was noted May 26-27 near Alamogordo, where seldom reported (Bloys, *fide* LM).

A pair of Gray Vireos fledged young at Glenwood, N. Mex., May 31 (B&DMcK) for the first breeding record of this species in Catron County, where rarely reported. Individual Red-eyed Vireos, rare transients in the Region, were s.w. of White Sands N.M., N. Mex., where one was found dead May 15 (JG), and near Portal, Ariz., May 18 (RM, *fide* SS).

WARBLERS — Despite the scarcity of some "common" migrants, the rare-but-regular warblers (Black-and-white, N. Parula, N. Waterthrush, Am. Redstart) were reported in about normal numbers in Arizona. Single Tennessee Warblers, now being found annually in small numbers in w. areas of the Region, were noted

near Patagonia May 4 (KK,GR), Redrock, N. Mex., May 6 (KJZ,BZ), and near Springerville, Ariz., May 19 (ST,GR).

A **Worm-eating Warbler** was observed Apr. 17 and May 5-6 at Rattlesnake Springs near Carlsbad, for about the seventh New Mexico sighting (R. Wilt); there still have been no documented records in the Region. A ♀ **Prothonotary Warbler** found June 6 near St. David, Ariz. (†DD) was about the seventh for Arizona. **Bay-breasted warblers**, very rare in the Region, made notable appearances. Four males were seen at Boone's Draw, e. N. Mex., May 6 (CGS *et al.*), for the highest number ever found in that state; in Arizona a female was noted May 15 n. of Mammoth (†ST) and a male May 19 near Patagonia (†R. Baxter *et al.*). A singing ♂ **Blackburnian Warbler** was seen in Madera Canyon May 14 (JG). There are only about three previous records of this still-undocumented species in Arizona.

In Cave Creek Canyon of the Chiricahua Mts., less than half a mile from last year's unsuccessful nesting attempt, a **Rufous-capped Warbler** was closely studied Apr. 18 (DSz,†KK,EC) but could not be relocated subsequently. The only previous Arizona records were in May and July of 1977 (AB 31: 1034,1174). Also in Cave Creek Canyon, a **Slate-throated Redstart** (*Myioborus miniatus*) was well-described May 2 (†C. Sexton). This Mexican species has been recorded once before in Arizona (April, 1976) and once in New Mexico (April, 1962).

ICTERIDS, TANAGERS — A ♂ Scott's Oriole at El Pueblo, San Miguel Co., N. Mex., May 29 (WH) was the second record there, where the species is at a n. limit in its range. There are only a few records of "Baltimore" Oriole in Arizona. One at Portal May 3-9 was photographed (W&SS,RM); and a male was at Tucson Apr. 23 until at least early May (WD).

At least five Hepatic Tanagers were in Mills Canyon in the Canadian Mts., n.w. of Roy May 17-21 (JPH *et al.*). There are few records of this species in n.e. New Mexico.

FRINGILLIDS — A Pyrrhuloxia was noted Apr. 29 at Silver City, where somewhat unusual (B. Miller, *fide* BJH). In Sawmill Canyon, where the first nesting of Evening Grosbeak in the Huachuca Mts. was recorded last spring (AB 31:1035), at least five pairs were present this May; nest-building by one pair was observed (RTS *et al.*, *fide* GB). A weakly-flying fledgling Cassin's Finch attended by an adult was found in Santa Fe May 22 (JPH *et al.*), establishing the first local nesting record.

Lawrence's Goldfinches appeared this spring in the B.W. Delta (where they did not winter) and were present through May. KVR felt that they might have nested. The situation was more definite on the Verde River n.e. of Phoenix, where Arizona's second nesting was recorded last year (AB 31: 1035); this year two pairs were building nests there May 7 (KK,RG,GR). A subad. ♂ **White-winged Crossbill** seen Mar. 24 in the Sandia Mts. (G. Ward) furnished the second record there and the fourth or fifth for New Mexico. At least three pairs of Rufous-winged Sparrows were found in late March near Coolidge, Ariz., a new n. limit for the species (KK,JW).

S.A.

Cassin's Sparrow continued to draw attention: the occurrences of this species seem more closely linked to conditions of ground cover than to any standard pattern of season or geography. As noted in our last report (*q.v.*), the species was present in exceptional numbers throughout s.e. Arizona during the winter. Following the unusual rains of late winter-early spring, with the grasslands in phenomenally lush condition for the season, the male Cassin's began singing in March. Every observer in s.e. Arizona remarked on the abundance of the species through mid-April, and some birds remained, singing, through the end of May. They were notably widespread: singing individuals were observed near Glenwood, N. Mex., Mar. 29 (first Catron County record — JPH), and near Cliff, N. Mex., Mar. 29 and May 6 (JPH, CA *et al.*). Near Globe, Ariz., the first local May records were established by several singing birds present May 20-30 (BJa). In late March near Coolidge, Ariz., supposedly outside the Cassin's winter/spring range, KK estimated local concentrations of over 500 birds per square kilometer! Notably, no singing birds were located in e.c. New Mexico Mar. 1 – Apr. 2 (JPH), even though special attention was paid for this species.

A Le Conte's Sparrow was reported in New Mexico across the Rio Grande from El Paso Mar. 4 (KJZ), being well described by an observer familiar with the species; this makes the second Rio Grande Valley record from the state — the other being from Espanola, November 1963. The species is otherwise known only as a rare local winterer in the Southeast.

A Clay-colored Sparrow at Santa Fe May 5-8 (B. Chudd) was the second local spring occurrence. Seven Golden-crowned Sparrow and ten White-throated Sparrow reports from the L.C.V. and s.e. Arizona, plus a Golden-crowned at Silver City May 6 (M&SO) were in addition to those reported during the winter. The number of Golden-crowns was somewhat higher than usual.

ADDENDUM — We would like to request again — if a visitor to the Southwest finds a rare bird, that he or she please telephone one of the editors or some local observer as soon as possible. In this way the occurrence may be confirmed, and if necessary, documented by a photograph. It will also provide an opportunity for the rarity to be seen by the local observers. We wish to thank the visitors who have alerted us immediately regarding their discoveries. We also wish to express our appreciation to the increasing number of visitors as well as local residents who have submitted carefully written details of their rare sightings.

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