

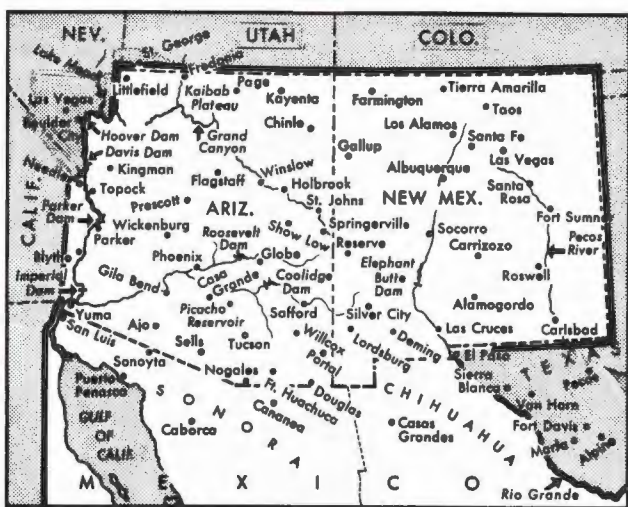


SOUTHWEST REGION

**/Janet Witzeman, John P. Hubbard
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In the warmer western sectors of the Region, where the two preceding mild winters had lulled us into a false sense of complacency, winter arrived dramatically the first week of December. The major storm that hit then was felt most intensively in southeast Arizona, where sub-zero temperatures numbed areas as low as Nogales. Heavy snowfall on December 7 forced the closing of Interstate 10 between Tucson and the New Mexico state line; and on the following morning, the desert landscape — with snow shrouding the saguaros and ocotillos — made an unforgettable sight. Temperatures remained colder than normal until early February, and another major wind and snowfall hit Arizona at the end of January.

By coincidence, KK birded the San Rafael Grasslands of southeast Arizona both just before and just after the December 7 snowfall. Three days before the storm he found Sprague's Pipits and Savannah, Baird's and Grasshopper sparrows to be present in near-normal numbers. Returning three days after the storm, he tramped for miles across the snowy wastes without flushing a single sparrow of any kind; the only remaining passerines were ravens, Horned Larks, meadowlarks and Chestnut-collared Longspurs, and this picture remained unchanged on subsequent visits through the end of the period.



Some other species reacted to the harsh conditions. Gray Flycatchers (normally the common wintering *Empidonax*) disappeared from the Patagonia area, but a few Hammond's and Dusky flycatchers (normally much less common) survived there, perhaps suggesting that the latter two, both northern-montane breeders, have higher tolerances for cold. Vermilion Flycatcher numbers dropped noticeably after the December storm and declined further following the late January freeze.

The period was also wetter than usual, with flooding in southeastern, southwestern, and south-central New Mexico and parts of central and western Arizona. By late winter, snow packs were 200% or more of their normal depth almost throughout the higher elevations of both states.

LOONS THROUGH IBIS — A Red-throated Loon at Painted Rock Dam Nov. 26 (†ST,GR) was about the fifth for Arizona. White Pelicans are usually scarce in New Mexico in winter, so the 80+ at Elephant Butte L., Jan. 1 (DM) were notable. A Brown Pelican from last summer's flight remained on the Lower Colorado River (hereafter, L.C.R.), near Yuma through the period, with another (or the same?) seen 50 mi farther n. at Cibola N.W.R., Dec. 31 (RD). The Olivaceous Cormorant continues to increase in numbers and regularity of occurrence in far s.w. New Mexico, with up to six at Evans L., Grant Co., Feb. 6-25 (JE) and one at Glenwood Feb. 8 (Roger Skaggs) — a first for Catron County.

The fall surge of Cattle Egrets into New Mexico left a residue of up to ten into December in the Carlsbad area (SW *et al.*), plus two at Bosque del Apache N.W.R., Dec. 1 (WS) and two at Las Cruces Dec. 16 (TM *et al.*). Larger numbers than ever wintered in the Phoenix region, with >200 present during the season at various points; a few were also scattered throughout s.e. Arizona. White-faced Ibises seldom winter in Arizona, but this year small numbers were present on Cibola N.W.R., and probably Imperial N.W.R., throughout the season (BMW *et al.*).

WATERFOWL — The wintering concentration of geese on Cibola N.W.R., was notable for Arizona in both numbers and variety. Six Ross' Geese and one "Blue" Goose accompanied the large flocks of Snow

Geese; Canada numbers peaked at 4000±, and three White-fronteds were also present; the best find at Cibola was the state's eighth (Black) Brant, with at least one present from Dec. 1 on, and two possibly three seen Feb. 16 (all BMW *et al.*).

A ♂ European Wigeon was at Phoenix Jan. 13 - Feb. 25 (P. Marshall *et al.*, ph., (N&CL), for a second or third Arizona record. Common Goldeneyes reached Arizona in exceptional numbers. The wintering concentra-

tion on the L.C.R., was conservatively estimated at 1000± (BMW); Prescott had "more than ever" (CST); record numbers were at Painted Rock Dam, and more than usual reached s.e. Arizona (DSZ *et al.*). Barrow's Goldeneye numbers in the L.C.R., were not above the recent average, but a male at Prescott Feb. 15-21 (CST *et al.*) was the first credible Arizona record away from the Colorado R. A ♀ Oldsquaw near Alamogordo Dec. 16 - January (†LM *et al.*) was only the sixth recorded for New Mexico.

RAPTORS — An ad. "Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawk, found entangled in some cording near Cochiti L., N. Mex., Jan. 18 (J. L. Rosetta), was released Feb. 18 after rehabilitation in Santa Fe. Photos established this as the second documented state record; the first dates from the 1850s, and was confirmed by Spencer Baird! An ad. Broad-winged Hawk near Tucson was seen only Feb. 6-7 but may have been attempting to winter somewhere nearby (KK *et al.*); there are about a dozen previous Arizona records. A Zone-tailed Hawk near Cliff, N. Mex., Feb. 14 (JE) was either very early or a wintering bird.

Combined surveys for the latter half of January showed at least 241 Bald Eagles wintering in New Mexico. This was only about two-thirds of last year's level, and the birds were more spread out this winter than last, especially s. and e. (JPH *et al.*). Single Caracaras outside recent limits were 33 mi e. of Yuma Dec. 5 (VH,DL) and 19 mi n. of Oracle Jct., Jan. 24 (DSZ,SP). An imm. falcon reported as an Aplomado Falcon was seen in Hidalgo County, N. Mex., Dec. 28 (†TM); the details supporting the report suggest that a correct identification of this raptor, now very rare in the U.S., was made.

CRANES THROUGH CUCKOOS — The experimental flock of Whooping Cranes wintered as expected in the middle Rio Grande Valley, with eight birds present until N migration in February; unexpected was another bird near Janos, n.w. Chihuahua Jan. 17-19, this being a juvenile from 1978's production (Rod Drewien *et al.*). Recently Long-billed Dowitchers have remained in s.e. Arizona through mild winters. The fact that some also remained during this year's harsh winter at Willcox, Nogales, and Tucson, perhaps indicates that this area is now a regular part of the winter range — regardless of whether the

season is mild or harsh (DSZ *et al.*). A very late phalarope, either a Northern or Red, was present at Bosque del Apache N.W.R., Dec. 2 (†WS).

A White-winged Dove at Williamsburg Feb. 14 (DM) was early. Single Groove-billed Anis, scarce stragglers from Mexico, were in Guadalupe Canyon, N. Mex., Dec. 5 (C. L. Cadieux) and at Phoenix Dec. 20-21 (DSJ *et al.*); at Arivaca, Ariz., where six were present last fall, one remained at least until Jan. 24 (DSZ).

OWLS, NIGHTJARS — A Ferruginous Owl was found n. of Tucson Jan. 28 (DSZ); although there may still be a resident population in this area, the birds are very rarely detected. Despite the cold, a Lesser Night-hawk was at Wellton, Ariz., as late as Dec. 25 (G&DR). Three Poor-wills at Carlsbad Caverns N.P., Feb. 19 (RW) were early — or perhaps wintering?

HUMMINGBIRDS, SWIFTS — In Ramsey Canyon of the Huachuca Mts., Ariz., hummingbird feeders sustained Anna's, Blue-throateds, Rivoli's, and even Violet-crowned hummingbirds through Dec. 7; however, none persisted there after the heavy snowfall and hard freeze Dec. 8 (DD). At Nogales Dec. 7 was also the last date for a lingering Violet-crowned (RMA). At Portal, farther from the center of the storm, one Rivoli's made it through December; five Blue-throateds survived the storm, with four present through January and at least three through February (W&SS). One and possible two imm. ♂ Rufous at Las Cruces lingered until at least Dec. 16 (TM *et al.*), the latest ever for New Mexico. January records of White-throated Swifts are rare in that state, so the "many" at Rattlesnake Springs in the period Jan. 12-14 (RW) and six in the Alamo Hueco Mts., Jan. 20 (BJH) were notable.

WOODPECKERS — The ♀ Red-bellied Woodpecker at Rattlesnake Springs in October was still present through Jan. 28 (RW). Single Gila Woodpeckers near Rodeo Dec. 31 (RS *et al.*) and Glenwood Dec. 29 (JPH) were out of their normal range in New Mexico. Several typically montane species of woodpeckers were present s. of their usual New Mexico range, including a Downy at Alamogordo Dec. 16 (*fide* LM), two Hairies at Roswell Dec. 16 (EP *et al.*) and one at Loving Feb. 11 (SW), and a N. Three-toed near Silver City Jan. 31 (M. Moseley).

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH CHICKADEES — A Black Phoebe at Cochiti L., Jan. 25 (N. Dodd, K. Giezantanner) was well n. of the normal winter range. Steller's and Scrub jays were evident in generally small numbers through the period at lower elevations and in the far s. of New Mexico, as their invasion of last autumn continued; most notable were the Steller's at Las Cruces (TM *et al.*) and s. of Alamogordo (LM), while Scrubs were present in the lower Pecos Valley (SW *et al.*) and one was even at Hobbs Dec. 21 (HS). The Blue Jay at Farmington in October, 1978 persisted into February (APN). Common Crows were more numerous than usual at Farmington (AN *et al.*), as well as at Bosque del Apache N.W.R., Dec. 30 (CH *et al.*) and near Las Vegas Feb. 20 (JPH). A magpie in the Sandia Mts., N. Mex., Dec. 16 (Jim Karo *et al.*) was s. of its usual range. Mountain Chickadees joined the corvid

invasion, including in the southernmost parts of the valleys of the Rio Grande (TM *et al.*) and Pecos rivers (SW *et al.*).

MIMIDS THROUGH WAXWINGS — A Bendire's Thrasher, rare in the L.C.R., wintered just n.e. of Yuma (VH *et al.*). American Robins were nearly absent over most of Arizona during early winter. However, about Feb. 1, large numbers appeared almost simultaneously at Tucson, Globe, Phoenix, Flagstaff, and in the L.C.R., the reasons for (and the sources of) this truly massive invasion are unknown. The species was also numerous in February in e. New Mexico, e.g., Portales (JPH) and Hobbs (HS). The season's only Varied Thrush was a female s. of Ehrenberg, Ariz., Dec. 19 (MH). Good numbers of all three bluebird species, especially Westerns, were present locally in s. Arizona foothills early in the winter; their spread into more low-lying and n. areas coincided with the robin movement in early February. Westerns and Mountains also invaded s. New Mexico, especially the latter species which reached the Mexican boundary area and also the e. plains near Tumacacuri. Easterns were evident in the lower valleys of the Pecos and Rio Grande rivers plus n. to Albuquerque — with three there Jan. 12 (JP *et al.*).

Most records of the rare occurrences of Bohemian Waxwings in Arizona have been in n. Arizona. A new location for the species in the state was in the n.e., at Ganado Feb. 18, when a flock of 40± was seen feeding in cottonwoods there (WL). Another individual was seen at Flagstaff Feb. 9 (C. LaRue, *vide* JC). The only ones reported in New Mexico were flocks in the Farmington area Dec. 14 and later (AN), except for an exceptional vagrant at Silver City Jan. 31 (M. Zimmerman, *vide* RAF).

SHRIKES THROUGH TANAGERS — Northern Shrikes were present in lower numbers in New Mexico than in the past two winters, but notable records included singles near Melrose Feb. 20 (JPH), and in Dona Ana County near El Paso Dec. 9 (KZ). A **Cape May Warbler**, representing Arizona's third record for this century, survived the winter at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum, which was also



Cape May Warbler, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Ariz., Jan. 6, 1979. Photo/Ken V. Rosenberg.

the site of the second record, in Spring 1977. Found Nov. 17 (ST, RG, GR), it was seen by many into March. Photos (JW, KVR *et al.*) provided the first acceptable documentation of the species' occurrence in the state; a 19th-century "Arizona" specimen lacks a precise date or locality.

Other notable winter warblers not on Christmas Bird Counts, included a Hermit Warbler Jan. 11 on the Kofa Game Range, Ariz. (L. Anderson), and a Wilson's Warbler n. of Nogales Jan. 7-21 (DSz, BD *et al.*). For the first time in several years, Scott's Hooded and Northern orioles all wintered at feeders near Tucson; this used to be a regular occurrence in the late 1960s (*vide* DSz). An ad. ♂ Scott's again wintered at Silver City (*vide* RAF), probably the same bird that has done so over three previous winters. Two W. Tanagers, quite rare in winter, were found in Phoenix Feb. 6 (SRD, HL).

FRINGILLIDS — The biggest news in this family was the scarcity of most species throughout s. Arizona (which is usually the wintering fringillid capital of the United States). Erratic visitors such as Lawrence's Goldfinch and Pine Siskin were virtually absent, but in addition most wintering sparrows (Savannah, Vespers, Grasshoppers, *Spizellas*, Lincoln's, White-crowns) were in very low numbers. Exceptions to the general paucity were Rufous-winged and Black-throated sparrows (which evidently enjoyed excellent breeding success in 1978) and Rufous-sided Towhees.

Single ♂ Cardinals at Silver City Jan. 2 (Mary Granger, *vide* RAF) and s. of Hachita, N. Mex., Jan. 21 (BJH) were out-of-range. Among the few Evening Grosbeaks reported in Arizona were up to 12 at Ganado Jan. 1 - Feb. 19 (HR, WL); the species' winter status with us is still poorly understood. A ♀ Purple Finch was at Portal Dec. 1-3 (ph., W&SS); almost all Arizona specimens are of the race *californicus*, which must arrive from the w., so it is odd that the species should occur so frequently at Portal, in the s.e. corner of the state. Unusual for Los Alamos, N. Mex., were 200 rosy finches Feb. 15 and earlier (Burt Lewis *et al.*), these being mainly Brown-capped with a few Gray-crowns including at least one *littoralis* (Hepburn's). A Grasshopper Sparrow was found Jan. 11 near Poston, Ariz. (JD; *Arizona St. Univ.); the species is extremely rare in the L.C.R.

Absolutely unprecedented was the down-slope movement of Yellow-eyed Juncos in s. Arizona. The species appeared in numbers in areas where never recorded before: at least four around Tucson (GG, KK *et al.*), several in the Baboquivari, Atascosa, and Patagonia Mts. (*vide* DSz, BH *et al.*), and two in Bisbee (DD); in addition, unusually large numbers occurred at low elevation in the Huachuca and Chiricahua Mts. (DD, W&SS).

An imm. Golden-crowned Sparrow at Santa Fe from Dec. 9 - Feb. 28+ (JPH, ph.) was perhaps the 12th specific record for New Mexico. A flood-damaged, unharvested sorghum field near Phoenix produced a bonanza for observers, with 20+ Chestnut-collared Longspurs (quintupling the previous Maricopa County record) and the county's first McCown's Longspur record Feb. 6+ (ST, ph., KVR *et al.*), as well as at least 10,000 each of House Finch and Savannah Sparrow!

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Abbreviations: †, written details on file with New Mexico Ornithological Society (N.M.O.S.) or with Arizona Bird Committee (A.B.C.); * specimen; ph., photo on file with N.M.O.S. or with A.B.C.; L.C.R., Lower Colorado River. — JANET WITZEMAN, 4619 E. Arcadia Lane, Phoenix, Ariz. 85018; JOHN P. HUBBARD, 2016 Valle Rio, Santa Fe, N. Mex. 87501; KENN KAUFMAN, 1411 E. Adams, Tucson, Ariz. 85719.