
SOUTHWEST REGION

Arizona

/Janet Witzeman

Each winter in Arizona has a character all its own, determined by the special group or groups of birds that decide to move in for the season to take advantage of the current food supply and weather conditions. Some winters bring numbers of Lawrence's Goldfinches, others bring American Robins, Cedar Waxwings and bluebirds, and still others bring invasions of montane species into the lowlands. This winter was characterized by a relative lack of American Robins, Cedar Waxwings and bluebirds, an abundance of sparrows in the southeast, and the first Rufous-backed Robins in any numbers since the winter of 1976-77.

In northern Arizona there were no true winter birds in the area during the season—no Northern Shrikes or longspurs, and even such species as Cassin's Finches were never seen in numbers as in the past.

In the report that follows are references to new or seldom-visited areas—the San Francisco River north of Clifton on the eastern border of Arizona, the ponds at McNeal in southeast Arizona that continue to attract new shorebird and waterfowl records, and Beaver Dam Wash



near Littlefield in extreme northwest Arizona. Because of its low elevation, Beaver Dam Wash was found to attract species that are normally rare or absent in northern Arizona in winter. During a visit to this area February 19-20, the list recorded by John Coons and Debbie Paulson included six Long-billed Marsh Wrens, one Orange-crowned Warbler and a Lincoln's Sparrow.

Finally, each season contributes new surprises. This winter those were provided by a Laughing Gull, a Worm-eating Warbler, Tree Sparrows and Black Rosy Finches!

LOONS THROUGH IBISES — A Com. Loon, uncommon away from the Lower Colorado River (hereafter, L.C.R.) was at Patagonia L., Dec. 8 (KK, JW). An Arctic Loon at a golf course pond in Tucson Dec. 4-11 (BB, WD, m.ob.) provided one of very few records for s.e. Arizona. The number of Olivaceous Cormorants at Patagonia L. increased to 21 during the winter—the largest number yet recorded in the state (GM, KK *et al.*). A late imm. Brown Pelican was at the Nogales sewage ponds Dec. 4 (DDe, P. Baicich) and an even later *adult* was at a golf course pond in Phoenix mid-November to at least Dec. 24 (AG, ph. SW). There are very few winter records for the state and even fewer records of adults at any time of year inland in the s.w. Winter records of White Pelicans away from the L.C.R. are uncommon; two were recorded in Tucson Dec. 12 (D. Knepper) and the one in Phoenix (since October) remained through the period (m.ob.).



Brown Pelican, Phoenix, Ariz., Dec. 24, 1982. Photo/S. West.

An unusually large flock of 250+ Cattle Egrets was concentrated in a field s. of Parker Feb. 28 (DK, LL). A few White-faced Ibises, uncommon in winter, remained into December on the L.C.R.: six were s. of Cibola N.W.R., Dec. 3 (RH *et al.*) and three at Parker Dec. 21-22 (CH).

WATERFOWL — Whistling Swans appeared at scattered locations about the state again, although not in the high numbers of the previous winter. Four were near McNeal and Elfrida Feb. 7-22 (AM), two at Phoenix Jan. 22-Feb. 28 (PB, JS *et al.*), one at Prescott Jan. 3 (CT) 14 at Chino Valley. n. of Prescott, Dec. 13 (R. Smith, *fide* CT), five at Alamo L., Dec. 28 (V. & E. Miller) and one at Cibola N.W.R., January-March (DL).

White-fronted Geese continued to be more numerous and widespread than usual: *ten* were near McNeal Feb. 9 (AM), two at Tucson Dec. 4-Feb. 28+ (m.ob.), one e. of Phoenix Jan. 9-Mar. 14 (TG, MJ *et al.*), one near Phoenix Jan. 30 (RN, VJ) and up to 14 at Cibola N.W.R., the end of February (DL). Up to 19 Snow Geese remained near McNeal until Feb. 7 (AM, DDa), one at Tucson to Feb. 28+ (DSz *et al.*) and up to 65 at Cibola N.W.R., during the period (JJ *et al.*). Two Ross' Geese were near McNeal until Feb. 7 (DDa, AM), one remained at Tucson through the period (DSz, GG *et al.*), one was e. of Phoenix Dec. 12 into April (ph. MJ *et al.*), and individuals were at Cibola N.W.R., Dec. 12 and Bill Williams Delta (hereafter, B.W. Delta) Dec. 25-26 (CH).

A Fulvous Whistling-Duck at Tucson Feb. 14 into March (B. Hunt, m.ob.) was noteworthy, however, its wild status was uncertain. A ♂ Eur. Wigeon near McNeal Dec. 27-Jan. 24 (AM, m.ob.) was about the tenth for the state. An ad. ♂ Oldsquaw was at Parker Dam Jan. 23 (†CH, RH). The species has been occurring almost annually on the L.C.R. in recent years. Among the Wood Ducks recorded during the period, of interest were the high number (30) on the Verde R., near Clarkdale Feb. 6 (RP, JC, DP, PP) and the individuals e. of the Santa Cruz R., in s. Arizona where the species had not been recorded previously: one in the Swisshelm Mts., e. of McNeal Dec. 16 (TD) and one near Winkelman Dec. 9-20 (K. Lease). Unprecedentedly high numbers of Pintails (4000) and Green-winged Teal (2200) were recorded on Upper and Lower L. Mary in late February (JC, DP); at most their numbers have been only in the hundreds in past winters there.

RAPTORS — A single White-tailed Kite was observed Dec. 25 at Marana, where up to five resided the previous summer (BB). Three lowland records of individual Goshawks came from n. of Ehrenberg Dec. 5 & Feb. 18 (†CH), n.w. Phoenix Dec. 8-20 (SD) and L. Pleasant, n.w. of Phoenix Dec. 29 (TC). An early returning Zone-tailed Hawk was seen over Huachuca Peak Feb. 26 (R. Taylor). Preliminary calculations from the survey of wintering Bald Eagles showed that the population was down by about 24% from the previous January, but about equal to the results for January 1981 (R.L. Todd).

SHOREBIRDS — Between seven and 15 Mountain Plovers were e. of Elfrida Dec. 15-Jan. 15 (AM) and up to four were at Marana Jan. 8-11 (DSz, GM, m.ob.). The status of the species in s.e. Arizona is still poorly understood. Long-billed Curlews, uncommon in winter, were recorded again near McNeal—7-10 were counted there Feb. 11-22 (AM). Dunlin were recorded at 4 areas in s.e. Arizona where the species is uncommon; singles were at the Bisbee-Douglas Airport sewage ponds Dec. 6 (AM), near McNeal Jan. 16 (AM, DDa) and at the Benson sewage pond Jan. 5-11 (DDe, SG); 2-3 were at the Nogales sewage ponds Dec. 6-9 (KK, JW, JBo).

GULLS THROUGH DOVES — A very late ad. Forster's Tern was at the Nogales sewage ponds Dec. 8 (KK, JW, GP) during the same unsettled weather that produced an ad. **Laughing Gull** there Dec. 10 (KK *et al.*). The gull provided possibly the first reliable report for s.e. Arizona and one of only a few records for the state.

White-winged Doves (five) were found far e. at Douglas again Jan. 24 (AM). Once again an Inca Dove (a different individual from the one banded there last year) spent the winter outside its normal range at a Portal feeder (S & WS).

HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH WOODPECKERS — A Violet-crowned Hummingbird frequented a Tucson feeder Jan. 18-Feb. 11 (EB); the only previous over-wintering record was also at a feeder in Tucson. Late staying Rufous Hummingbirds were individuals at Portal to Dec. 3 (S & WS), at Tucson Dec. 5 (JBo, DSz) and Green Valley Dec. 9 (GP). A late ♂ Broad-tailed Hummingbird was observed at Globe Dec. 11 (BJ).

A ♂ Coppery-tailed Trogon in Ramsey Canyon Feb. 20 (R. Vetter)

furnished one of only a few winter records for the state. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*S. v. varius*) at Parker in late November remained until at least Dec. 22 (GR) and another of this race was at Cibola N.W.R., Dec. 14 (CH, DK).

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH CREEPERS — Five E. Phoebes recorded during the winter included three individuals (one until Mar. 12) n. and e. of Tucson (DSz, JBo, C. Corchran), one at Cibola N.W.R., Dec. 2 (†DK) and one s. of Wickenburg Feb. 8 (JS). A very late or wintering Coues' Flycatcher was at Harshaw, s.e. of Patagonia Dec. 11 (KK) and another individual was below Stewart Mt. Dam, e. of Phoenix Feb. 23 (SD). The species is uncommon in winter. A W. Flycatcher, rare in winter, was observed at Cibola N.W.R., Jan. 30-Feb. 13 (†DK).

The late Barn Swallow at Parker remained until at least Dec. 22 (CH, GR). The two Com. Crows at Tucson in November remained at least into February (KK *et al.*) and another was near Marana Feb. 12 (GG), s. of the species' usual range.

Two Mexican Chickadees wintered at Portal, a lower than usual elevation (S & WS). Mountain Chickadees continued to be present in the lowlands of s.e. Arizona during the winter: one at Tucson to at least February (KK, m.ob.) and two along the San Francisco R., Feb. 16 (SM). For the second year a Mountain Chickadee was recorded on the Portal CBC (F. Scheider); the species had not been known to occur in the Chiricahuas previously. Bridled Titmice were recorded in 2 unusual lowland areas: one at Marana Dec. 31 (DSz) and four n.e. of Oracle Feb. 17 (GM, D. Lee). A flock of up to 15 Bushtits, uncommon on the L.C.R., were seen n. of Ehrenberg Dec. 5 & Feb. 19 (CH, DK). Lowland Brown Creeper reports came from the L.C.R., where up to five were seen in B.W. Delta during the winter and one at Parker Dec. 4 (CH, DK).

CATBIRD THROUGH PIPITS — Gray Catbirds are extremely rare in s.e. Arizona, and especially so in winter. Surprising therefore, were singles in *three* areas in the southeast: at Portal Dec. 3 (D. Shepherd), at Kino Springs, near Nogales Dec. 9 into April (JBo, m.ob.) and at the San Bernardino Ranch, n. of Douglas Jan. 9-23 (DDa, RBa). Still another Gray Catbird was at a feeder in Prescott from Dec. 12 into April (M. Minkler, *vide* CT). The only previous winter record for the state came from the species' traditional nesting area near Springerville.

Three Brown Thrashers, sparse winter visitors, were recorded: the one at Hereford (since mid-November) remained at least to Jan. 25 (DDe *et al.*), one at Tucson early December-at least Dec. 15 (P. Pray) plus one on the Phoenix CBC (PB). Records of LeConte's Thrasher on the L.C.R., are scarce and its status there is poorly understood; in addition to the one on the Parker CBC, one was seen n. of Ehrenberg Dec. 20 (RH). Five Sage Thrashers were recorded in pinyon-juniper habitat along the San Francisco R., Feb. 17 (SM). The species is probably regular there, but the area is rarely visited in winter.

Except for Guadalupe Canyon where there were numbers of Am. Robins, elsewhere in the state the species was almost absent, and in the s.e. Am. Robins were literally outnumbered by Rufous-backed Robins. Including the November records and the five recorded on CBCs, a high of 11 Rufous-backed Robins strayed N this winter. One frequented a Sun City yard, w. of Phoenix, the last week in December (T. & R. Wolff), one at Cibola N.W.R., Jan. 19 (JJ), one at Patagonia Jan. 17-Feb. 6 (JD, N. Preimesherger), and one at Tucson Feb. 21 (K. Burke); two were recorded on the Nogales CBC, one on the Parker CBC (since mid-November), the one on the Ramsey CBC at Hereford remained at least to Jan. 16 (DDe, JD *et al.*) and the one on the Green Valley CBC was present into February (C. DeWaard).

Except for the area along the San Francisco R., where W. Bluebirds were numerous (SM), Western and Mountain bluebirds were almost lacking in the lowlands.

At least 16 Sprague's Pipits observed n. of Ehrenberg Dec. 4-20 (†CH, DK, RH) was a high number for the L.C.R.

VIREOS, WARBLERS — A Hutton's Vireo, rare on the L.C.R., was observed near Cibola N.W.R., Dec. 14 (†CH).

A **Worm-eating Warbler** along the Verde R., e. of Phoenix Jan. 19 (†M. Larson) provided the first winter record for the state and about the 21st overall. The Ovenbird in n.e. Phoenix since Oct. 30 remained until Feb. 16 (DSj) and provided the first definite over-wintering record for

that species, although several winter records exist. Another interesting wintering warbler record was provided by an Am. Redstart that remained in Tucson October-at least Jan. 26 (JBo, DSz *et al.*). In addition to the ♂ Am. Redstart on the Yuma CBC, an ad. female was observed n. of Wellton, L.C.R., Dec. 8 (†DK, CH *et al.*).

Other notable winter records were of a Nashville Warbler at Marana Feb. 12 (GM, DDe, D. Lee), a ♂ N. Parula at Whitlow Dam, n. of Florence Jct., Jan. 8-9 (T. Clark) and 16 Myrtle Warblers among the 800 Audubon's Warblers at Beaver Dam Wash Feb. 20 (JC, DP).

Two late N. Waterthrushes were found in n. Arizona: one near Strawberry, Sierra Ancha Mts., Dec. 5 (RN) and one along W. Clear Cr., Dec. 22 (CT). In addition to the three Black-and-white Warblers recorded on CBCs, one was recorded at Cibola N.W.R., Dec. 20 (JJ) and one e. of Tucson Dec. 24 (DDe).

Olive Warblers only occasionally wander down to the Upper Sonoran Zone, so of interest were four ♂ Olive Warblers along the seldom visited San Francisco R., Feb. 16-17 (SM).

ICTERIDS, TANAGERS — A ♂ Hooded Oriole (originally thought by some to be a Streak-backed Oriole) was visiting a Tucson feeder Dec. 22-Feb. 28 (M. Chalif, KK *et al.*). (See Corrigendum.) A flock of 30-40 Great-tailed Grackles throughout the period in Flagstaff, where this expanding species began wintering only recently, was the largest winter group yet recorded there (JC).

A ♀ Summer Tanager, rare in winter, was seen along the Santa Cruz R., Tucson Jan. 26 (R. Hynes, DDe, B. Koenig).

FRINGILLIDS — For the second winter a ♀ Pyrrhuloxia was at the same far n. locality at Skull Valley, w. of Prescott Dec. 13-Jan. 14 (H. & A. Gaither, CT). A sub-ad. Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Beaver Cr., n.e. of Prescott Dec. 22 (CT) probably represented the first winter record for n. Arizona. A very late Indigo Bunting was at the Patagonia Sanctuary Dec. 11 (KK *et al.*); there are no acceptable mid-winter records for the state. Notable were eight Evening Grosbeaks in Guadalupe Canyon Feb. 21 (AM, DDa). Two **Black Rosy Finches** were found along the Kaibab Trail below the S. Rim of the Grand Canyon Jan. 4 (W. Buskirk). There have been only 4 previous state records and only one previous record for the S. Rim—in November and December, 1956.

A ♀ Rufous-sided Towhee, appearing to be of the e. race, was studied in B.W. Delta Feb. 28 (†LL); this form had not been known to occur in Arizona. A Lark Bunting, uncommon in w. Arizona, was seen near Poston Dec. 4 (BA). Southeast Arizona, the winter capital for sparrows, was especially alive this year. This was the best winter on record for Cassin's Sparrow; this highly erratic species was present in exceptional numbers—many were banded near Tucson (RBo). Baird's and Grasshopper sparrows were also present in above-average numbers, and it was a good year for Brewer's and Vesper sparrows as well.

A Gray-headed Junco of the *dorsalis* race was observed in Ramsey Canyon Jan. 16 (JD); this race that breeds in n. and e. Arizona rarely moves this far s. Yellow-eyed Juncos were present at Portal in unprecedented numbers all winter—90+ (SS), and one wandered again to Bisbee where it was recorded Dec. 21 (DDa).

At least two and probably four Tree Sparrows were observed at Chino Valley, n. of Prescott Jan. 15-28 (CT); the species is a rare, seldom encountered winter resident in n.e. Arizona and these individuals were farther s. and w. than usual. Of interest were at least seven McCown's Longspurs in with the Horned Larks in the San Rafael grasslands Jan. 17 (JD), and two there Feb. 12 (S. Suter); the species is an uncommon and irregular winter resident in s.e. Arizona.

CORRIGENDUM — The following records of Streak-backed Oriole at Tucson previously reported in this column should be deleted: AB 34:189, AB 35:214, AB 36:205 and AB 36:319. All of these records are now believed to pertain to Hooded Oriole. See the article on identification of these two species in the previous issue (AB 37:140).

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