



SOUTHWEST REGION

Arizona, Sonora

/Janet Witzeman and David Stejskal

It was a winter of extremes. Rain in December (nearly three times the December average) contributed to giving the state its fourth-wettest year on record. The record-breaking freeze in early February brought the coldest temperatures in five years and even more highland species to the

lowlands. The record rains of last summer resulted in lush conditions in the floodplains around Prescott and all over southern Arizona, thus attracting a high density of seed-eaters into those areas.

Waterfowl diversity and density was the highest in 11 years at Prescott, with 3000 to 5000 individuals by mid-January that supported four Bald Eagles, three Merlins, a Peregrine Falcon and a Prairie Falcon through the winter.

The major story of the winter, however, was the invasion of northern and montane species. Not since the winter of 1972-1973, and in some



cases not since the winter of 1950-1951, had the magnitude and variety been so great. And, like those other two winters, this winter had "everything"—woodpeckers, jays, chickadees, nuthatches, bluebirds, robins, a few solitaires, towhees, plus the finches—Purple, Cassin's, Red Crossbills, Pine Siskins, goldfinches and Evening Grosbeaks.

There was a nice surprise as well. Arizona is known as the baby state for more reasons than one—to birders it is because every state in the union except Arizona had Common Grackle on its list—until this winter, that is. Yes, it finally happened—Common Grackles in Arizona!

ABBREVIATIONS — L.C.R. = Lower Colorado River.

LOONS THROUGH IBISES — An Arctic Loon, rare away from the L.C.R., was at Painted Rock Dam Feb. 9 (CB, JT). Two of the seven Com. Loons at Prescott remained into January (CT). Two half-grown young light-phase W. Grebes were observed begging and being fed by two adults at Topock Marsh on the very early date of Jan. 20 (RN). Western Grebes are uncommon in winter at Prescott where there were three (CT), and in s.e. Arizona where up to four were recorded at McNeal in December (AM). Four individuals were present during the period at ponds around Phoenix where the species is only occasionally recorded in winter (L. Burge, MC, RN, DT).

An Am. White Pelican, rare in n. Arizona, was on a lake near Heber Dec. 8-9 (C. Lewis, *fide* DT). A late-staying Brown Pelican was at Topock Marsh Jan. 20 (RN). A Double-crested Cormorant, an uncommon visitor to s.e. Arizona, was at McNeal Jan. 6-12 (B. & J. Epler, AM). An Olivaceous Cormorant was observed Feb. 17 at Patagonia L. (JSa, C. Johnson), where the species has often been present in numbers, but has been scarce the past 2 years.

An Am. Bittern, rarely seen in s.e. Arizona, was found at a ranch in Elfrida Dec. 24 (AM). A Least Bittern at Peña Blanca L., Jan. 1 (†B. Brautigan) represented one of only a few winter records for the state and the first for that area; the species is rare at any time of year away from the L.C.R. and the Phoenix area. Great and Snowy egrets were recorded at areas where they are not usually found in winter. From one to two Great Egrets were at McNeal (AM *et al.*), two were in Tucson (m.ob.), and 10 were in Phoenix (RN) during the period. Up to eight Snowy Egrets were at McNeal during the period (AM), one was near Portal Dec. 1 (R. Blondell), one was at Prescott Dec. 15 (CT), and six were at Phoenix Feb. 17 (RN). High numbers of Cattle Egrets (250+) were counted near Gadsden, s.w. Arizona, Jan. 10 (GM) and 50+ were in s.w. Phoenix during the period (PB, RB). A lone individual at the Ajo City P., Jan. 1 (B & SR) was in an odd location. In s.e. Arizona, where the species is less common, there were up to 11 at McNeal, nine at Palominas, up to 13 at Elfrida, one at Douglas (AM *et al.*), and 12 s. of Portal (*fide* SSp). A Cattle Egret at Flagstaff Dec. 30 (T. Britt) and 17 at Young Nov. 22 (D. Carrothers) added to the growing number of reports in n. Arizona this year.

White-faced Ibises are uncommon in winter away from the L.C.R.; 10 were at Picacho Res., Dec. 1 (C. Green) and unprecedented were two at McNeal Dec. 14, one of which remained until Feb. 17 (AM).

WATERFOWL — From seven to 10 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at Gilbert, s.e. of Phoenix, from mid-January through the period (P. Burch, *fide* DS) represented one of only a few winter records for the state. The only Tundra Swans reported this winter were an adult and an immature at Prescott Dec. 15 into January (CT) and one at Horseshoe Dam Dec. 27 (*fide* DT). Greater White-fronted Goose records away from the L.C.R. were of individuals at Sierra Vista sewage ponds Dec. 8 (AM, DD) and at the Bisbee/Douglas sewage ponds all winter (AM). Individual Ross' Geese were recorded at Benson (JSa), Hereford (AM, DD, TD), Sierra Vista (D. Collazo), Tucson (J. Hoffman), n.w. Phoenix (R. Zook), s.w. Phoenix (MC), and L. Havasu (KR *et al.*) during the winter.

Wood Duck is rare in extreme s.e. Arizona; up to four were at McNeal Jan. 2-Feb. 6 (AM). Of interest elsewhere where they are not common were up to three in s.w. Phoenix Dec. 9-17 (DS *et al.*), two at Chandler Jan. 18 (TC), and one at Gila Bend Feb. 24 (PB *et al.*). Cinnamon Teal usually do not remain through the winter on the L.C.R., so unusual were the 200 that wintered at Cibola N.W.R. (B. Anderson). Also of note were a male at Prescott from mid-December to mid-January, providing the first winter record for that area (CT), and two at McNeal Jan. 1 (FS, JSa). The ♂ Eur. Wigeon returned to Papago P., Phoenix, for the 6th winter (MC); a 2nd male was observed at another pond in Phoenix during February (T. Chew, *fide* PB). A ♀ Greater Scaup was at the Benson sewage ponds Jan. 3-12 (FS *et al.*); two males at Prescott Dec. 7-Jan. 2 (CT) represented the 3rd record for that area; and four were at L. Havasu City Dec. 21 (ph. KR). A ♂ Oldsquaw at the Avondale sewage ponds, s.w. of Phoenix, Dec. 13-19 (RB, ph. GR, m.ob.) represented one of only a few records away from the L.C.R.



White-winged Scoter below Parker Dam, Ariz., Dec. 21, 1984. Photo ©Ken Rosenberg.

The White-winged Scoter at Parker Dam since mid-November remained at least to Dec. 23 (ph. KR). Twenty-four Barrow's Goldeneyes were counted below Davis Dam Feb. 25 (GM), and one was below Parker Dam Dec. 22 (KR). Two to three Hooded Mergansers were in Tucson from at least mid-December through the period (m.ob.) and one was in Phoenix Feb. 4+ (*fide* PB). One to two Com. Mergansers, uncommon in s.e. Arizona, were at McNeal Jan. 1-16 (FS, JSa, AM). Eight at a pond in Phoenix Feb. 18 (RN) were unusual as the species is seldom seen away from the rivers and larger bodies of water in the area.

RAPTORS — Two Ospreys were seen interacting at the confluence of the Salt and Verde rivers Jan. 26 (RN); the species has nested in this area in the past but not since 1951. Up to eight Black-shouldered Kites wintered in the Sulphur Springs Valley, s.e. Arizona (AM *et al.*). In c. Arizona one was near Arlington Dec. 28 (JSh), two were at Painted Rock Dam Feb. 9 (CB, JT), and one was at Paloma, w. of Gila Bend, Feb. 17 (RN). Wintering Bald Eagles were more common than usual in s.e. Arizona again: an immature at McNeal Jan. 28, an adult at Kansas Settlement Feb. 9 (AM *et al.*), two to six near Sonoita during February, and several in the San Rafael Valley in January and February (m.ob.).

Harris' Hawks dispersed (as they occasionally do in winter) to areas out of their normal habitat and where they had not been recorded previously: one at Paloma Dec. 9 (RF), three s. of Roosevelt L., Jan. 3 (J. Poe), and two n. to near the Santa Maria R., Yavapai Co., Feb. 24 (GM). Numbers of Harris' Hawks (up to 12) in the Sulphur Springs

Valley during the winter were much higher than what had been recorded previously. **Red-shouldered Hawk** is an irregular and sparse visitor to s. Arizona with only about one-half dozen records in modern history, so surprising were two individuals during the period: an adult at Paloma Dec. 2 at least to Feb. 24 (CB, JT *et al.*) and one in s.w. Phoenix Dec. 17 (†R. Witzeman). Good numbers of Rough-legged Hawks (as well as Ferruginous) were reported overall, with one Rough-legged Hawk being found as far s. as Cananea, Sonora, Feb. 17 (DD, TD). A high concentration of 10 Golden Eagles was observed feeding on 2 dead sheep carcasses at Elfrida Feb. 1 (AM). One in s.w. Phoenix Feb. 6 was at a lower elevation than usual (J. Burns). A total of 16 Golden Eagles and four Merlins was counted between Bisbee and Sonoita during the Hawk-watch Feb. 2 (AM, DD, TD).

SHOREBIRDS, GULLS — Numbers of Mountain Plovers wintering in the McNeal/Elfrida area have been increasing since the species was first discovered there 7 years ago. The dramatic jump in numbers which occurred there last winter repeated itself this year with a new high of 100 Jan. 30 (AM *et al.*). American Avocets, uncommon in the southeast in winter, were recorded there again this year: up to two were at McNeal at least during December, and four were at Willcox Feb. 9 (AM, TD *et al.*). Also noteworthy for s.e. Arizona were seven Greater Yellowlegs at McNeal Jan. 1 (JSA) and one still there Jan. 29 (BD), 15 Long-billed Curlews n. of Elfrida Feb. 26 (TD), and a Dunlin at McNeal Dec. 4 to at least Jan. 1 (AM, FS). The late Solitary Sandpiper in s.w. Phoenix remained until Dec. 9 (DS) and provided the 2nd winter record for that area. A very late Long-billed Dowitcher at Prescott in mid-December was most unusual.

Seven Bonaparte's Gulls (the same number as last winter!) were at McNeal again Dec. 7 with two still present Dec. 25 (AM); the species is usually uncommon anywhere in the state in winter. More gulls than usual, including a few Californias, were present off and on all winter at Prescott (CT). A first-winter Herring Gull, an uncommon visitor especially away from the L.C.R., was observed at Prescott Feb. 16 (BT, *fide* CT). A Black-legged Kittiwake was discovered at L. Pleasant, n.w. of Phoenix, Dec. 31 (CB, JT); there had been only a dozen or so previous records.

DOVES THROUGH OWLS — White-winged Doves are sometimes locally common far e. at Douglas in winter; a new high of 17 was there Dec. 19, with four still present Feb. 28 (AM). Farther e. still was one at Portal Dec. 1-Jan. 31, and a 2nd individual that arrived late in January (SSp, WS). An Inca Dove was found n. of its usual range at Prescott Dec. 11-Jan. 4 (L. McClelland). The Com. Ground-Dove is an irregular winter visitor to the Sulphur Springs Valley; up to four were seen at a ranch in Elfrida in early December, and two were in Douglas Jan. 27 (AM).

Greater Roadrunners sometimes stray to surprising heights and locations. In n. Arizona, where the species is scarce anytime, one seen Jan. 7 at 7200' on L. Mary—which was frozen and covered with 6" of snow—seemed incredible (JSh).

Three Long-eared Owls, uncommon winter residents, were found at Cabeza Prieta N.W.R., Dec. 17 (GM), and four were at Elfrida Jan. 1 (H. Hobart, T. Huels).

HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH WOODPECKERS — A Violet-crowned Hummingbird returned to the same feeder in Douglas where it (or another) had spent most of last winter; this year it remained Oct. 21-Feb. 14 (B. Smith) and provided the 4th winter record for the state. Five Blue-throated Hummingbirds remained at Portal feeders at least through December and at least three through January (SSp, WS, RM). A late-staying Anna's Hummingbird was at the Southwest Research Station Dec. 31 (JSA).

The Green Kingfisher present at Kino Springs since last summer remained through the period (m.ob.).

Lewis' Woodpeckers continued to be seen at many places in c. and s. Arizona through the winter (m.ob.). Other woodpeckers found at lower than normal elevations were two Acorn Woodpeckers through the period at Tempe and a Williamson's Sapsucker there Feb. 20 (CH), plus a Hairy Woodpecker at Globe Jan. 12 (M & MW).

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH NUTHATCHES — A W. Flycatcher, rare in winter, was heard at Bill Williams Delta Dec. 21 (KR, GR *et al.*).

A Tree Swallow, rare in s.e. Arizona in winter, was observed at McNeal Dec. 4-Feb. 9 (AM, TD).

Individual Scrub Jays continued to be seen at scattered lowland locations during the winter (TC, RN, CT). Up to two Clark's Nutcrackers were at Prescott Jan. 5-11 (BT, CT). American Crows at out-of-the-ordinary locales were one at Tucson Dec. 3 (JB), five at Prescott Jan. 14-15 (H & AG, CT), and 26 at Chino Valley, n. of Prescott, Feb. 20+ (H & AG).

A few Mountain Chickadees continued to be seen at lower elevations: one banded at Tucson Dec. 16 (K. Burke), two at Catalina S.P., n. of Tucson, Jan. 12-Feb. 24 (RC, RH, GM), one e. of Phoenix along the Verde R., Jan. 26 (RN), and one all winter at Miami (JSp). A small invasion of this species occurred in the valleys around Prescott (CT). Three single Plain Titmice, observed in washes in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mts. during February (RH), were out of their normal habitat, as was one at a Globe feeder Dec. 13-Feb. 5 (M & MW). Bushtits were flocking in exceptional numbers in Prescott after a blizzard Dec. 17; 300+ were counted in one flock and 44 in another (CT). Individual Red-breasted Nuthatches continued to be recorded at scattered lowland areas around Phoenix, Tucson, Prescott, and Miami.

WRENS THROUGH SHRIKES — A Winter Wren, an uncommon winter visitor, was in s.w. Phoenix Dec. 9 at least to Dec. 17 (DS, RN). At least one Am. Dipper, a scarce winter visitor to s. Arizona, was in Madera Canyon Dec. 29-Jan. 17 (m.ob.), an area with few previous records; another individual was above Herb Martyr, Chiricahua Mts., Jan. 26 (R. Plage). Although locally common in a few areas, it was generally a poor winter for Ruby-crowned Kinglets in s. Arizona and around Prescott (GM, CT).

Western Bluebirds were common all winter around Phoenix, the L.C.R., and other lowland areas in s. Arizona; up to eight were in the Sulphur Springs Valley, where the species is more irregular (AM, TD). Mountain Bluebirds were abundant everywhere, even in the Sulphur Springs Valley where they had not been recorded in large numbers before. Thirteen Hermit Thrushes were banded at Tanque Verde Ranch, Tucson, Feb. 7 following the very cold, wet weather system (C. Corchran, P. Walters); the species was scarce this winter prior to that time. American Robins were present in good numbers in early winter and then increased dramatically in early February when thousands were reported around Globe, Tucson and Phoenix: 200 in one Phoenix yard alone. A ♂ Varied Thrush found dead under a window in Tucson Feb. 7 (*Univ. of Ariz.) was the only one reported this winter.

Sage Thrashers, usually uncommon winter visitors, seemed to be everywhere in the Sulphur Springs Valley this year (AM). The only Sprague's Pipit reported was one at the Buenos Aires Ranch, w. of Nogales Dec. 5 (B. Matheny, J. Palting). One adult and one imm. N. Shrike were observed e. of Williams Jan. 10 (TC).

WARBLERS — A late Tennessee Warbler was at Paloma Dec. 15 (CB, JT). A Yellow Warbler was found in the same spot in s.w. Phoenix for the 3rd winter in a row from early November at least to Dec. 17 (DS, RN). Again this winter, Chestnut-sided Warblers were almost as "common" as last year. The one in a Phoenix yard since Nov. 4 remained until Jan. 17 (RB), one at the Phoenix Zoo was present from Dec. 13 until late December (MC), and three individuals were recorded in s.w. Phoenix in mid-December (DS, RN, GR, RF, CB).

A ♂ **Cape May Warbler** was at a feeder in Tucson from Dec. 10 at least through March (ph. BD, ph. R. Bowers, SSu). Another individual was observed at Patagonia Dec. 16 (AM). Half of the 8 state records have been in winter. Two late ♂ Black-throated Blue Warblers were at Ramsey Canyon Dec. 10 and one was still there Dec. 11 before the snow and cold nights that began there Dec. 13 (†A. & F. Hirst).

Black-throated Gray Warblers were present in good numbers throughout s. Arizona this winter; two recorded again at Cabeza Prieta N.W.R., Dec. 17 (GM) were in an area where considered uncommon. A ♂ Townsend's Warbler at Prescott Dec. 9 (H & AG) and three in the Huachuca Mts. (m.ob.) in mid-December were at higher elevations than usual on these late dates. A Grace's Warbler at Prescott on the exceptionally late date of Dec. 11 (BT) represented the first "winter" record for the state.

The two Black-and-white Warblers in s.w. Phoenix in late fall remained at least to Dec. 14 & 17 respectively (DS *et al.*); one was at



Male Cape May Warbler at Tucson, Ariz., present all winter 1984-1985, photographed Mar. 23, 1985. Photo/Richard K. Bowers.

Ramsey Canyon Dec. 15+ (JSa), and one was at Tubac S.P., Jan. 11-13 (B. Buttery, m.ob.). The only Am. Redstarts reported were on the L.C.R.; in addition to the ones on the Parker and Yuma C.B.C.s, one was found below Imperial Dam Feb. 3 (D. Robinson).

A Louisiana Waterthrush was present Dec. 16+ in the same area of the Patagonia Sanctuary where one resided last winter (†R. Baxter, R. Smith). There are now about a dozen state records. A MacGillivray's Warbler was at Estrella Mt. Park, w. of Phoenix, for several days prior to Feb. 6 (MC *et al.*); only one of the previous few winter records in the state extended past early January. Individual Wilson's Warblers were recorded at Sabino Canyon Dec. 17 (K. Nickey), at the Tucson sewage ponds Feb. 20 (C. Johnson), and in n.w. Tucson Feb. 23 (SSu), plus the ones on the Parker, Phoenix, and Yuma C.B.C.s. Lingering single Painted Redstarts were recorded at Patagonia and Tucson in mid-December, and one was in Baboquivari Canyon Jan. 19 (D. Fischer).

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS — A N. Cardinal, uncommon at Prescott in winter, was at Granite Creek Jan. 4 through the period (CT). Pyrrhuloxias at the edge of their range included one Jan. 2 and Feb. 13 at Skull Valley, w. of Prescott, in the same location as one recorded there 2 other winters recently (CT); one from late January through the period e. of Prescott (CT); and one at Miami Jan. 4-Feb. 4 (JSp). A ♂ Rose-breasted Grosbeak, uncommon in winter, frequented a Phoenix feeder Jan. 3 into March (RN).

Rufous-sided Towhees were noticeably abundant at lower elevations from Phoenix and Globe s. through s. Arizona (m.ob.). The flock of 20+ Am. Tree Sparrows n. of Many Farms remained through the period (B. Jacobs *et al.*). Previously the species was considered to be only a sparse and irregular winter resident in n. Arizona with no more than one to four ever seen at one time.

Several Fox Sparrows were reported: one at a feeder in Prescott all winter (VM), one to four at Patagonia (JB, GM), one at Cabeza Prieta N.W.R., Dec. 17 (GM), and two in Elfrida Jan. 1 (AM *et al.*). Swamp Sparrow is considered to be only a casual winter visitor to n. Arizona, so noteworthy was one at Arcosanti, s.e. of Prescott, Dec. 26 (BT). Two Golden-crowned Sparrows were at Prescott, one at a feeder from late November through March (VM) and one Dec. 18 (CT). A Harris' Sparrow was at a feeder in Cave Creek n.e. of Phoenix from early January into March (F. Cassanova *et al.*).

Two Yellow-eyed Juncos were in Bisbee, where they had been recorded only once before, Nov. 10-Jan. 5 (DD). McCown's Longspurs were common again in the McNeal/Elfrida area as they were last winter; up to 85 were counted in mid-December and smaller numbers remained through the period (AM, SSu, JB).

BLACKBIRDS, ORIOLES — After years of waiting and searching for **Common Grackle**, suddenly there were two within days of each other, both discovered as a result of Christmas Counting. The first (found while scouting for the L. Pleasant C.B.C.) was heard and then seen with thousands of Brewer's Blackbirds that were coming to roost at L. Pleasant, Dec. 18 at least to Jan. 23 (†TC, ph. GR, m.ob.). The 2nd (found on the Santa Catalina C.B.C.) was e. of Tucson Dec. 23 at least to Jan. 7 (LD, ph. N. Bock, SSu *et al.*), also with large numbers of Brewer's Blackbirds.



Male Cape May Warbler at Tucson, Ariz., Mar. 22, 1985. Photo/Bill Davis.

This winter's Hooded Oriole records were away from feeders: a male e. of Tucson Dec. 23 (LD *et al.*) and a first-year male at a ranch in McNeal Feb. 8 (AM). More unusual were two N. (Bullock's) Orioles—one at a Prescott feeder Dec. 14-29 (E. & R. Backus, *fide* CT) and one at a Camp Verde feeder from late fall through the period (F. Sanford, *fide* CT); these were the first winter records for n. Arizona, and there have been only about a dozen winter records in the state overall.

FINCHES — The invasion of Cassin's Finches into mid and low elevations was the talk of the season—they were everywhere, with the "greatest numbers ever" around Prescott and down into the Verde Valley, at Globe feeders, Tucson, Organ Pipe Cactus N.M., Madera Canyon, Huachuca Mts., Portal feeders where numbers increased to 25+ in January, to Phoenix and even to Parker where 14+ represented one of the few records for the L.C.R. The invasion of Purple Finches was no less spectacular; however, their winter descents into the lowlands have not been as infrequent as those of Cassin's Finches. Small numbers were recorded at Portal, Madera Canyon, Patagonia, Tucson, and farther n. at Globe, Prescott, Camp Verde, Clear Creek, Beaver Creek, Montezuma Castle, Skull Valley and Burro Creek. Numbers in these n. localities "equalled or surpassed any other invasion" (CT). At Parker, at least a dozen were seen together with Cassin's Finches in the same trees (GR, JW, ph. KR).

Red Crossbills, around in lowland areas since the fall, continued to be seen in a few areas around Phoenix, Tempe, and Wickenburg; they were "everywhere" in Tucson (m.ob.), and were in the Verde Valley for the first time (CT). They were also present in the mountains around Prescott, and up to three were near Montezuma's Well Dec. 29-Jan. 10 (CT, S. Hyde). Pine Siskins were abundant at Portal and found in good numbers around Phoenix and other lowland areas. Lawrence's Goldfinches, continuing to have their most successful season since 1973-1974, were recorded from Sedona, Prescott, Verde Valley, Globe, and down to Phoenix, Tucson, Elfrida, Douglas and Parker.

To complete the winter scenario of the flight of the finches, there were Evening Grosbeaks. Small groups of up to 10 were present during the period in Redington Pass (R. Chapin, S. Stoner), Tucson (J. & B. Tweit), Guevavi Ranch (BD), Florida Wash (RC), Portal (SSp), and Nogales. In n. Arizona they were fairly common in Flagstaff, and numbers increased steadily turning into a big movement around Prescott, Verde Valley, W. Clear Creek, and Beaver Creek (CT). Two were found as low as the Verde R., e. of Phoenix, Dec. 25 (CH).

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