

## Trip Report — Arizona Winter Specialties 2024

December 28, 2024-January 3, 2025 with Cory Gregory



Anna's Hummingbirds are stocky, short-billed hummers, but they're also downright stunners when seen well! Lucky for us, we started our trip out enjoying many of these in Phoenix. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Arizona is a wonderful destination for birding, regardless of the season. In winter, a different suite of birds moves into this southwestern state and our short trip aimed to sample birding in a wide range of habitats. From the creosote deserts hosting thrashers, the Saguaro-lined hillsides near Tucson, various waterholes, riparian corridors near Patagonia, to the Sky Islands which are home to canyons like Madera Canyon, we birded in all of these! I was happy to have such a fun group and it was my pleasure to go birding with you six.

Our trip together got underway in Phoenix, the largest city and capital of Arizona. The first afternoon we ventured to the Gilbert Water Ranch to get our footing, so to speak, with a wide variety of common desert species. The water there had attracted Cinnamon Teal, 100+ Ring-necked Ducks, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, and even a Western Grebe. The muddy edges hosted a sharp Black-necked Stilt, a trio of

American Avocets, many Long-billed Dowitchers, a secretive Wilson's Snipe, and a smattering of Least Sandpipers. Meanwhile, rustling under the vegetation were ground-feeders like Gambel's Quail, Curve-billed Thrasher, various sparrows, and Abert's Towhee. And although flitting from bush to bush were Black and Say's phoebes, Verdin, and some spry little gnatcatchers, perhaps the highlight of the outing came when a seemingly-tame Greater Roadrunner strolled right out into the open! What a way to meet this quintessential resident ground-cuckoo!



A quintessential species in Arizona, the Greater Roadrunner! This particular bird walked right out and between us!  
Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

With a respectable variety under our belt after the first afternoon, it was time to go farther afield and branch out. The first place we did this, on our first full day together, was to the west of Phoenix. The targets? Thrashers! No sooner than we got out of the car and crossed the road, we found the short-billed Bendire's Thrasher singing atop a tree. Splendid! Then the hunt for the pale ghost of the desert began. Thankfully, luck was on our side and we crossed paths with a pair of LeConte's Thrashers pretty quickly. We watched as they darted on the ground but eventually were rewarded with views of one perched atop of a low bush. Adding yet another thrasher back near the van, a couple of Sage Thrashers kept a close eye on us (or was it the other way around?). And with that, our thrasher hunting was off to a great

start. A nearby roadside was absolutely loaded with Long-billed Curlews but it was the Mountain Bluebird, Western Bluebird, raptors, and Burrowing Owl that got most of our attention. After lunch, we made a quick stop at Robbins Butte Wildlife Area but it was pretty quiet at that time of day. We ended the day by venturing to Encanto Park in Phoenix. Although the main attraction was the established population of Rosy-faced Lovebirds, and yes, they were easy, we ended up adding a wide variety of new species too. Black-crowned Night-Herons crept nearby, Anna's Hummingbirds buzzed overhead, Bronzed Cowbirds piled into a tree, a couple of Harris's Hawks screamed nearby, and we tallied our first Gila Woodpeckers.



The Sandhill Crane show at Whitewater Draw was spectacular! Thousands of cranes stood in the fields, hundreds more approached, circled and carried on right in front of us! Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

By this point, we had finished the birding we wanted to do in the Phoenix area and so we started our way towards Tucson. One of the main birding destinations that next morning was a sod farm where we were eventually rewarded with a great little flock of Mountain Plovers! Being one of the more difficult shorebirds to track down, we were really happy with the views we had. Other open-country birds flitted nearby, along the roadsides and fields, and we added Horned Lark, Rock Wren, Lark Bunting, Western Meadowlark, and Loggerhead Shrike. Farther south, and just west of Tucson,

sits the Tucson Mountain Park. With hillsides dotted with Saguaros, it was a beautiful spot to take in the Sonoran Desert. Right off the bat we added Cactus Wren, Phainopepla, and Canyon Towhee. After a lunch in Tucson, we ventured up to one of the most famed birding spots in the entire country, Madera Canyon. Although the canyons tend to be quieter in winter, there was no shortage of activity and we enjoyed great views of Rivoli's Hummingbird, Acorn and Arizona woodpecker, Bridled Titmouse, Yellow-eyed Junco, Painted Redstart, and Hepatic Tanager. The star of the show though was a brief Berylline Hummingbird that visited the feeders.

Although perhaps the first thought that comes to mind when you say "desert" is being hot, the other extreme is also very true; it gets COLD in the desert! That next morning we found this out first-hand at Catalina State Park. Brr! But once it warmed up, so did the bird activity; we added Hutton's Vireo, Hermit Thrush, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Pyrrhuloxia, Green-tailed Towhee, and others. Plus, watching the sun spill over all the Saguaros was a special thing to witness. From Tucson, we ventured eastward until we stopped at the ponds in Benson. Although the rarest thing there was a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers, other things caught our attention first; the ponds had Snow Geese, a Ross's Goose, 100+ Northern Shovelers, some Bufflehead, and Eared Grebe, and also a Vermilion Flycatcher. After our lunch in Willcox, we visited the famed Lake Cochise and Twin Lakes Golf Course. Wow, the Sandhill Crane numbers were building to what was at least 2000-3000! After we finished enjoying our views of the Mexican Ducks and various shorebirds, we were off to Whitewater Draw. We finished out our day there, watching the great spectacle that makes Whitewater Draw such a well-known birding spot; the Sandhill Cranes! It felt impossible to estimate how many cranes were there but we think at least 10,000. The wetlands had other great things we were happy to see; close Northern Pintails, distant Chihuahuan Ravens, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, and the gaudy Vermilion Flycatchers. But before long, we had to start back to Tucson, our home base.



We enjoyed many scenic vistas on this trip too including this view of the Santa Ritas. We birded in two different canyons there in the Santa Ritas; Madera and Montosa Canyon. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Happy New Year! The next morning we chose a new place to explore first thing. We ventured up into the Santa Ritas, but on a less-traveled road. Montosa Canyon, a beautiful steep-walled canyon south of Madera Canyon, was our main destination. Although very chilly again first thing, we eventually got great looks at a Rufous-crowned Sparrow. After the morning sun was able to angle down to the valley floor, things warmed up and the birding improved. We added Dusky Flycatcher to our triplist, heard Canyon Wren songs cascading down from high above us, and walked alongside some tame Brewer's Sparrows, Canyon Towhees, and Bewick's Wrens. Before lunch, we ventured back up into Madera Canyon to get another crack at some of the specialties. But before we could even get there, our very first Golden Eagle showed up overhead and we all ended up getting good views of it as it soared lazily in circles. Up in the canyon, we checked out the feeders at the Santa Rita Lodge again and enjoyed repeat views of Mexican Jay, Lesser Goldfinch, and two different subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco. Farther up the road, by Madera Kubo, we had great looks at Red-naped Sapsuckers as they came in and ate berries. After our lunch in Green Valley, we stopped briefly at the Desert Meadows Park to snag the tiny and beautiful Costa's Hummingbird. After our success there, we turned our attention to Canoa Ranch where we strolled a loop trail around the lake. Out-of-season and quite

rare, a Broad-tailed Hummingbird continued to be seen there as it zoomed from flower to flower. We also enjoyed our very first flock of Redheads, a dapper Black-throated Sparrow, and the lovely and irruptive Lawrence's Goldfinch.



We enjoyed Gambel's Quail a number of times but none better than the first afternoon at Gilbert Water Ranch.  
Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

We still had a full day of birding for our last day, this one focused on the Patagonia area. We made our way down into the grasslands near Sonoita where the morning light made waves over the seas of yellow grass and spiky yuccas. Some grassland exploration netted us a nice collection of grassland species including Grasshopper Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, and Chihuahuan Meadowlarks. Farther down the road, near the town of Patagonia, we visited some riparian habitat; the highlight here was certainly a very rare-for-Arizona Varied Thrush! Meanwhile, the forest floors nearby were hosting leaf-kicking competitions between the many White-crowned Sparrows, Abert's Towhees, Green-tailed Towhees, Hermit Thrushes, and Bewick's Wrens. Any visit of Patagonia should include birding at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds. It was here that we added our one and only sighting of the range-restricted Violet-crowned Hummingbird! We also finally found some Inca Doves though they took a bit of work. And finally, our final birding stop was at the nearby

Patagonia Lake State Park. We enjoyed our last looks at Inca Dove, White-winged Dove, Verdin, Chipping Sparrow, Black-throated Sparrow, and Pyrrhuloxia as we said goodbye to the desert.

**Other critters seen on the trip:**

Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)  
Rock Squirrel (*Spermophilus variegatus*)  
Arizona Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus arizonensis*)  
White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

Although short but sweet, our birding trip together in Arizona was a lot of fun and I hope each of you made good memories as we explored the many habitats and special birds. These trips wouldn't be possible without you and so a big thanks to each of you! Also key to the success of this trip was the home support we had from Austin and especially Christine and the hard work she put in. Lastly, thank you again and I hope to see you on a future Field Guides trip!

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:

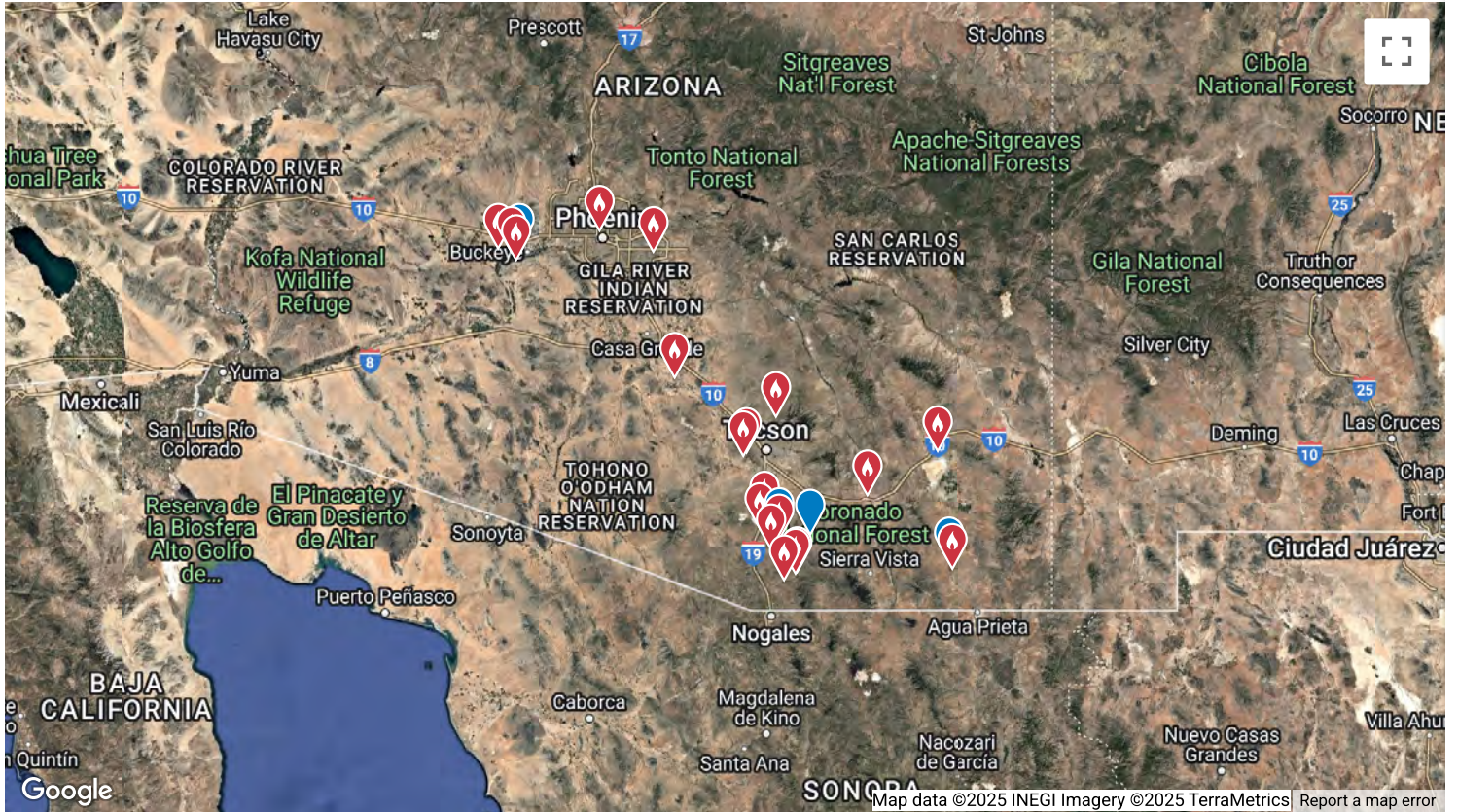
<https://ebird.org/tripreport/316675>

-- Cory Gregory (Curlew)

# Field Guides Birding Tours -- ARIZONA WINTER SPECIALTIES, 2024 (with Cory Gregory)



28 Dec 2024 – 2 Jan 2025 (6 days) Link-only



📍 Arizona, United States

Cochise | Maricopa | Pima | Pinal | Santa Cruz

👤 Cory Gregory



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip...


















































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## Species Observed






























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94	<b>Snow Goose</b> <i>Anser caerulescens</i>	  2
2	<b>Ross's Goose</b> <i>Anser rossii</i>	  2
7	<b>Canada Goose</b> <i>Branta canadensis</i>	  2
1	<b>Cinnamon Teal</b> <i>Spatula cyanoptera</i>	  1
211	<b>Northern Shoveler</b> <i>Spatula clypeata</i>	  6
3	<b>Gadwall</b> <i>Mareca strepera</i>	  2
151	<b>American Wigeon</b> <i>Mareca americana</i>	  2  8
114	<b>Mallard</b> <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	  6
4	<b>Mexican Duck</b> <i>Anas diazi</i>	  2
40	<b>Northern Pintail</b> <i>Anas acuta</i>	  1  1
33	<b>Green-winged Teal</b> <i>Anas crecca</i>	  4
35	<b>Canvasback</b> <i>Aythya valisineria</i>	  1
29	<b>Redhead</b> <i>Aythya americana</i>	  1
160	<b>Ring-necked Duck</b> <i>Aythya collaris</i>	  2
5	<b>Lesser Scaup</b> <i>Aythya affinis</i>	  1
3	<b>Bufflehead</b> <i>Bucephala albeola</i>	  1
2	<b>Red-breasted Merganser</b> <i>Mergus serrator</i>	  1
64	<b>Ruddy Duck</b> <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	  5
4	<b>Gambel's Quail</b> <i>Callipepla gambelii</i>	  1  1
4	<b>Wild Turkey</b> <i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	  1
59	<b>Rock Pigeon</b> <i>Columba livia</i> *	  3

23	<b>Eurasian Collared-Dove</b> <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> *	▶  3
7	<b>Inca Dove</b> <i>Columbina inca</i>	▶  2
3	<b>White-winged Dove</b> <i>Zenaida asiatica</i>	▶  2
129	<b>Mourning Dove</b> <i>Zenaida macroura</i>	▶  10
6	<b>Greater Roadrunner</b> <i>Geococcyx californianus</i>	▶  2  4
7	<b>Rivoli's Hummingbird</b> <i>Eugenes fulgens</i>	▶  2
9	<b>Anna's Hummingbird</b> <i>Calypte anna</i>	▶  3  3
2	<b>Costa's Hummingbird</b> <i>Calypte costae</i>	▶  2
1	<b>Broad-tailed Hummingbird</b> <i>Selasphorus platycercus</i>	▶  3  1
5	<b>Broad-billed Hummingbird</b> <i>Cynanthus latirostris</i>	▶  2
1	<b>Violet-crowned Hummingbird</b> <i>Ramosomyia violiceps</i>	▶  1  1
1	<b>Berylline Hummingbird</b> <i>Saucerottia beryllina</i>	▶  1
2	<b>Common Gallinule</b> <i>Gallinula galeata</i>	▶  1
42	<b>American Coot</b> <i>Fulica americana</i>	▶  7
12,500	<b>Sandhill Crane</b> <i>Antigone canadensis</i>	▶  2  2
3	<b>Black-necked Stilt</b> <i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	▶  2
3	<b>American Avocet</b> <i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	▶  1
59	<b>Killdeer</b> <i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	▶  6
8	<b>Mountain Plover</b> <i>Anarhynchus montanus</i>	▶  1
190	<b>Long-billed Curlew</b> <i>Numenius americanus</i>	▶  1  1
65	<b>Long-billed Dowitcher</b> <i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	▶  2
5	<b>Wilson's Snipe</b> <i>Gallinago delicata</i>	▶  4
24	<b>Greater Yellowlegs</b> <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	▶  3
81	<b>Least Sandpiper</b> <i>Calidris minutilla</i>	▶  6

6	<b>Pied-billed Grebe</b> <i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	▶  5
1	<b>Eared Grebe</b> <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Western Grebe</b> <i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	▶  1
9	<b>Double-crested Cormorant</b> <i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	▶  2
27	<b>Neotropic Cormorant</b> <i>Nannopterum brasilianum</i>	▶  2
5	<b>White-faced Ibis</b> <i>Plegadis chihi</i>	▶  1
2	<b>Black-crowned Night Heron</b> <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	▶  1
19	<b>Snowy Egret</b> <i>Egretta thula</i>	▶  2
7	<b>Great Egret</b> <i>Ardea alba</i>	▶  4
32	<b>Great Blue Heron</b> <i>Ardea herodias</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Black Vulture</b> <i>Coragyps atratus</i>	▶  1
19	<b>Turkey Vulture</b> <i>Cathartes aura</i>	▶  5
1	<b>Osprey</b> <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Golden Eagle</b> <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	▶  1  1
1	<b>Sharp-shinned Hawk</b> <i>Accipiter striatus</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Cooper's Hawk</b> <i>Astur cooperii</i>	▶  1
10	<b>Northern Harrier</b> <i>Circus hudsonius</i>	▶  5
2	<b>Harris's Hawk</b> <i>Parabuteo unicinctus</i>	▶  1  1
7	<b>Red-tailed Hawk</b> <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	▶  4
1	<b>Great Horned Owl</b> <i>Bubo virginianus</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Burrowing Owl</b> <i>Athene cunicularia</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Belted Kingfisher</b> <i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	▶  1
6	<b>Red-naped Sapsucker</b> <i>Sphyrapicus nuchalis</i>	▶  2

6	<b>Acorn Woodpecker</b> <i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>	▶   2
17	<b>Gila Woodpecker</b> <i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i>	▶   7
2	<b>Ladder-backed Woodpecker</b> <i>Dryobates scalaris</i>	▶   1
5	<b>Arizona Woodpecker</b> <i>Dryobates arizonae</i>	▶   2
7	<b>Northern Flicker</b> <i>Colaptes auratus</i>	▶   2
2	<b>American Kestrel</b> <i>Falco sparverius</i>	▶   2
25	<b>Rosy-faced Lovebird</b> <i>Agapornis roseicollis</i> *	▶  1  1
1	<b>Dusky Flycatcher</b> <i>Empidonax oberholseri</i>	▶  1  1
7	<b>Black Phoebe</b> <i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	▶  1  5
7	<b>Say's Phoebe</b> <i>Sayornis saya</i>	▶  1  7
7	<b>Vermilion Flycatcher</b> <i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>	▶   4
1	<b>Hutton's Vireo</b> <i>Vireo huttoni</i>	▶  3  1
2	<b>Loggerhead Shrike</b> <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	▶   2
17	<b>Mexican Jay</b> <i>Aphelocoma wollweberi</i>	▶   2
9	<b>Chihuahuan Raven</b> <i>Corvus cryptoleucus</i>	▶   1
7	<b>Common Raven</b> <i>Corvus corax</i>	▶   4
8	<b>Bridled Titmouse</b> <i>Baeolophus wollweberi</i>	▶   3
8	<b>Verdin</b> <i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>	▶  1  4
295	<b>Horned Lark</b> <i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	▶   2
4	<b>Ruby-crowned Kinglet</b> <i>Corthylio calendula</i>	▶   4
5	<b>White-breasted Nuthatch</b> <i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	▶   3
2	<b>Brown Creeper</b> <i>Certhia americana</i>	▶   1
7	<b>Black-tailed Gnatcatcher</b> <i>Polioptila melanura</i>	▶   2

1	<b>Rock Wren</b> <i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Canyon Wren</b> <i>Catherpes mexicanus</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Northern House Wren</b> <i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Marsh Wren</b> <i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	▶  1
10	<b>Bewick's Wren</b> <i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	▶  5
3	<b>Cactus Wren</b> <i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i>	▶  1  1
10	<b>European Starling</b> <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	▶  2
3	<b>Curve-billed Thrasher</b> <i>Toxostoma curvirostre</i>	▶  2
2	<b>Bendire's Thrasher</b> <i>Toxostoma bendirei</i>	▶  2  1
2	<b>LeConte's Thrasher</b> <i>Toxostoma lecontei</i>	▶  4  1
2	<b>Sage Thrasher</b> <i>Oreoscoptes montanus</i>	▶  1  1
6	<b>Northern Mockingbird</b> <i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	▶  2
3	<b>Eastern Bluebird</b> <i>Sialia sialis</i>	▶  1
12	<b>Western Bluebird</b> <i>Sialia mexicana</i>	▶  2
1	<b>Mountain Bluebird</b> <i>Sialia currucoides</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Varied Thrush</b> <i>Ixoreus naevius</i>	▶  1  1
2	<b>Hermit Thrush</b> <i>Catharus guttatus</i>	▶  1  2
1	<b>American Robin</b> <i>Turdus migratorius</i>	▶  1
2	<b>Phainopepla</b> <i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	▶  1  2
30	<b>House Sparrow</b> <i>Passer domesticus</i> *	▶  3
6	<b>American Pipit</b> <i>Anthus rubescens</i>	▶  2
19	<b>House Finch</b> <i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	▶  8
4	<b>Pine Siskin</b> <i>Spinus pinus</i>	▶  1

29	<b>Lesser Goldfinch</b> <i>Spinus psaltria</i>	▶  5
1	<b>Lawrence's Goldfinch</b> <i>Spinus lawrencei</i>	▶  1
6	<b>Rufous-winged Sparrow</b> <i>Peucaea carpalis</i>	▶  1  1
10	<b>Grasshopper Sparrow</b> <i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	▶  1  1
2	<b>Chipping Sparrow</b> <i>Spizella passerina</i>	▶  1
2	<b>Brewer's Sparrow</b> <i>Spizella breweri</i>	▶  1  1
3	<b>Black-throated Sparrow</b> <i>Amphispiza bilineata</i>	▶  2
3	<b>Lark Sparrow</b> <i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	▶  2
30	<b>Lark Bunting</b> <i>Calamospiza melanocorys</i>	▶  1
7	<b>Dark-eyed Junco</b> <i>Junco hyemalis</i>	▶  4
7	<b>Yellow-eyed Junco</b> <i>Junco phaeonotus</i>	▶  2
107	<b>White-crowned Sparrow</b> <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	▶  11
3	<b>Sagebrush Sparrow</b> <i>Artemisiospiza nevadensis</i>	▶  2
45	<b>Vesper Sparrow</b> <i>Pooecetes gramineus</i>	▶  4
10	<b>Savannah Sparrow</b> <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	▶  2
2	<b>Song Sparrow</b> <i>Melospiza melodia</i>	▶  2
10	<b>Lincoln's Sparrow</b> <i>Melospiza lincolni</i>	▶  4
7	<b>Canyon Towhee</b> <i>Melospiza fusca</i>	▶  1  3
10	<b>Abert's Towhee</b> <i>Melospiza aberti</i>	▶  5
2	<b>Rufous-crowned Sparrow</b> <i>Aimophila ruficeps</i>	▶  1  1
7	<b>Green-tailed Towhee</b> <i>Pipilo chlorurus</i>	▶  1  5
1	<b>Spotted Towhee</b> <i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	▶  1
6	<b>Yellow-headed Blackbird</b> <i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>	▶  1

- 23 **Western Meadowlark** *Sturnella neglecta* ▶ 📄 3
- 5 **Chihuahuan Meadowlark** *Sturnella lilianae* ▶ 📄 1 📄 1
- 66 **Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus* ▶ 📄 6
- 9 **Bronzed Cowbird** *Molothrus aeneus* ▶ 📄 1
- 45 **Brown-headed Cowbird** *Molothrus ater* ▶ 📄 1
- 30 **Brewer's Blackbird** *Euphagus cyanocephalus* ▶ 📄 1
- 27 **Great-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus mexicanus* ▶ 📄 3
- 3 **Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas* ▶ 📄 2
- 12 **Yellow-rumped Warbler** *Setophaga coronata* ▶ 📄 6
- 2 **Painted Redstart** *Myioborus pictus* ▶ 📄 2
- 4 **Hepatic Tanager** *Piranga flava* ▶ 📄 2
- 5 **Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis* ▶ 📄 2
- 4 **Pyrrhuloxia** *Cardinalis sinuatus* ▶ 📄 2

#### ADDITIONAL TAXA

- 4 Domestic goose sp. (Domestic type) *Anser sp. (Domestic type)* ▶ 📄 1
- 5 Western/Chihuahuan Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta/lilianae* ▶ 📄 2