

Trip Report — Arizona Winter Specialties 2025

December 27, 2025-January 2, 2026 with Cory Gregory



The Costa's Hummingbird is a tiny but charming hummingbird we enjoyed south of Tucson on this tour. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

One can find great birding in Arizona any time of year and winter is no exception. Although some species have migrated south, others wander to Arizona and some even start to defend territories. This winter trip, based out of Phoenix and Tucson, highlighted many of these aspects and we enjoyed a great time birding together for a quick five days.

We tallied nearly 140 species and ended up seeing some neat mammals and amazing scenery as well. From the desert flats west of Phoenix, to the gorgeous mountains east of Phoenix, and down to Tucson and the nearby mountains and grasslands, there was always something fun to look at. And

besides, we really lucked out with weather! It was a fun trip and I'm glad you were all there to enjoy some beautiful winter birding in Arizona.

Our trip got underway in Phoenix where we started by birding at a nearby hotspot, the Gilbert Water Ranch, our first afternoon. It didn't take long to start to see some fun desert species. A Greater Roadrunner darted along the path, Anna's Hummingbirds sang from nearby treetops, Curve-billed Thrashers skulked in the brush, and the range-restricted Abert's Towhees put in many appearances. Additionally, the pond gave us point-blank looks at some species we don't usually see so close-up. Ring-necked Ducks and the American Wigeon sure looked good in that evening light!



The Coppery-tailed Tropic bird, formerly known as Elegant Tropic bird in Arizona, is very rare in the winter. Still, we got lucky and found this lovely male near Madera Canyon. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

The next morning, we set off on a quest to see what the desert flats west of Phoenix had to offer. En route, along the many canals, we had a lovely set of

birds while the sun was still low to the east. We found Black-necked Stilts, Greater Yellowlegs, Pied-billed Grebe, and nice herons like Snowy Egret, Great Egret, and of course Great Blue Herons. Western Meadowlarks flocked together and a few American Pipits bobbed up and down along the banks. But after a bit, we pressed on.

Once we made it out to the dry flats west of the city, we started our hunt for sage-loving species. We turned up a flock of Sagebrush Sparrows, which was excellent, but also an adorable and inquisitive Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. A Say's Phoebe kept watch nearby, a few Abert's Towhees skuttled around on the ground, and the ever-present Verdin and Horned Larks were seen too. Nearby wet fields attracted a lot of things as well including a Burrowing Owl along a roadside, a variety of ducks like Canvasback and Ring-necked Duck, and also some shorebirds like Long-billed Dowitcher and Least Sandpiper. Nearby, a corral was home to a variety of cowbirds as well as Brewer's Blackbirds.

That afternoon we visited the Glendale Recharge Ponds which were absolutely loaded with a great assortment of waterfowl and shorebirds. We scoured through hundreds of Long-billed Dowitchers, hundreds of ducks like Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, and Gadwall, and enjoyed seeing a Peregrine Falcon, Osprey, and especially some Harris's Hawks along the entrance road!

We finished off the day with a visit to Encanto Park in Phoenix where we successfully found the Rosy-faced Lovebirds, which wasn't hard, but also encountered the continuing rare Lewis's Woodpecker that had been spending the winter there. What a great first full day of birding!



Though not as flashy in the nonbreeding plumage, the Chestnut-collared Longspur was a target of ours and we had smashing success! Participant Elizabeth Harding not only spotted this camouflaged bird on the ground, but she got a lovely photo too.

We departed Phoenix this morning and drove straight up to the east, climbed into the Superstition Mountains, and birded at the well-known Bryce Thompson Arboretum. This gorgeous location has long been a hotspot, great for winter birding. Our triplist grew by leaps and bounds in quick fashion. We heard a rare Steller's Jay near the entrance, tracked down a rare Juniper Titmouse, heard some Canyon Wrens singing, and, most importantly, had brief looks at the very rare Rufous-backed Robin! There were other highlights in the park as well though including a wintering Black-throated Gray Warbler and a Townsend's Warbler. Phainopepla made a quick appearance and the many Hermit Thrushes were busy feeding in the fruiting trees.

We departed, had lunch en route, and then made our way south towards Tucson. We tried a few other spots for some thrashers, plovers, and other open-country birds but all were quiet midday. We continued south and checked in to our comfortable hotel, our home base for the remainder of the trip.



It was a rare and special treat to enjoy this day-roosting Northern Saw-whet Owl at a park in Tucson! Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

This morning we ventured east and south of Tucson, targeting the lovely grasslands which are part of the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area. Our first stop on this chilly morning yielded a lot of sparrows, predominantly Vesper and Savannah. However, it was exciting seeing a small flock of Mountain Bluebirds pass through and Chihuahuan Meadowlarks sang from nearby treetops. At a different, nearby patch of grasslands, we struck gold and found 100-200 Chestnut-collared Longspurs! Although they were nearly impossible to see on the ground, somehow Elizabeth did just that and we all enjoyed great views of this

skulky bird. Nearby a Horned Lark posed nicely on a fence, we continued to kick up lots of Vesper and Savannah sparrows, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk buzzed by.

After lunch in Patagonia, we birded at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds which provided us looks at Ladder-backed and Gila woodpeckers, Bewick's Wren, Lesser Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal, Spotted Towhee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Inca Dove, and of course the star of the show, the Violet-crowned Hummingbird. We closed out the day back in Tucson where we had the incredible good fortune of seeing a day-roosting Northern Saw-whet Owl! Why it liked to roost in that spot, I'm not sure, but I AM sure that we really enjoyed seeing this little guy!



One of the highlights of the trip wasn't a flashy and rare specialty, but instead the incredible experience we had with this particular Sora near Willcox. Had we ever seen this species so well? I'm not so sure! Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

We ventured east this morning making it all the way to Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area which is a well-known gathering spot for birds (and birdwatchers!). Of course, the Sandhill Crane show was great, but there were lots of other highlights as well. We added Snow Goose to our triplist as well as enjoyed Cinnamon Teal, Mexican Duck, and a variety of other waterfowl. A male Vermilion Flycatcher dashed in front of us, Marsh Wrens crept through the reeds, and both Say's and Black phoebes were on the hunt for flying bugs. Once we departed and started driving north, we started to encounter some wintering Lark Buntings. Not just a couple, but we ended up seeing hundreds as they swarmed alongside the road! Shortly after, we added Yellow-headed Blackbird to the list as well.

After lunch we visited the must-stop hotspot in Willcox, the famed Lake Cochise and Twin Lakes Golf Course. Things were off to a good start when we had awesome looks at Bendire's Thrasher on the way in! The lake was hosting a ton of waterfowl and it was great to have such good looks at Ross's Geese alongside some Snow Geese. Another highlight was getting to watch a Sora foraging out in the open! Stunning views. Lastly, we made our way back to the west, stopping in Benson. This was another great spot for waterfowl; we estimated 200-300 Canvasbacks! Mixed in were Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, and 75 Ring-necked Ducks. It was here we added Eared Grebe to our list as well.



In the mammal department, we saw some neat things including this herd of Pronghorn in the grasslands southeast of Tucson. Photo by participant Elizabeth Harding.

Our final full day of birding started when we went south out of Tucson to Canoa Ranch. This proved to be a fruitful stop, we had absolutely crushing views of a male Costa's Hummingbird as well a major trip highlight, a flock of Lawrence's Goldfinches! This irruptive goldfinch can sometimes be hard to find in Arizona in winter, but this year looked to have been a good one and we had crippling scope views of a flock of males and females near the pond. Also nearby, our first Brewer's Sparrow and handsome Lark Sparrows. From here we ventured up to Madera Canyon where we took a hike up from Proctor Rd. With some luck, we had great looks at a male Coppery-tailed Trogan! Yes! We also found a hybrid sapsucker (looked to be a mix of Red-naped and Red-breasted) and also had a quick lesson on flicker intergrades. We watched the busy feeders at the Santa Rita Lodge and enjoyed Rivoli's Hummingbirds, Acorn Woodpeckers, Mexican Jays,

Bridled Titmice, a Yellow-eyed Junco, Hepatic Tanagers, and a brief Painted Redstart before we needed to head back to town. We closed out the trip with a foray to the dry plains northwest of Tucson. A brief Prairie Falcon, a regal Ferruginous Hawk, and an adorable Burrowing Owl were the final new birds of the trip.

I wanted to thank all of you for coming along on this short, Arizonan adventure! It's always a joy to bird in Arizona and I'm happy I got to share it with you. We came away with a great list of birds and I hope you all made some good memories as well! I hope to see you soon on another Field Guides trip, safe travels!



Another one of the surprising highlights of the trip was yet again not the rarest of birds, but the views we had of a common bird. This Horned Lark sat close to us and in stunning morning light. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Other critters we saw:

Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) - The common cottontail in the lowlands.

Cliff Chipmunk (*Neotamias dorsalis*) - Seen a few times up in the mountains.

Round-tailed Ground Squirrel (*Zerospermophilus tereticaudus*) - Seen briefly on our final day.

Arizona Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus arizonensis*) - Common, especially around the Paton Center.

Collared Peccary (*Dicotyles tajacu*) - One crossed the road right in front of us!

Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) - Fairly common

White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) - Common

Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) - A nice, close herd was seen in the grasslands southeast of Tucson.



The Lawrence's Goldfinch is a very irruptive species and some winters it's hard to find even one in Arizona. This winter, however, we were treated to one of the best shows of this specialty one could ask for. We encountered a flock of about 50 south of Tucson and reveled watching them in the morning light. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: [**https://ebird.org/tripreport/460034**](https://ebird.org/tripreport/460034)

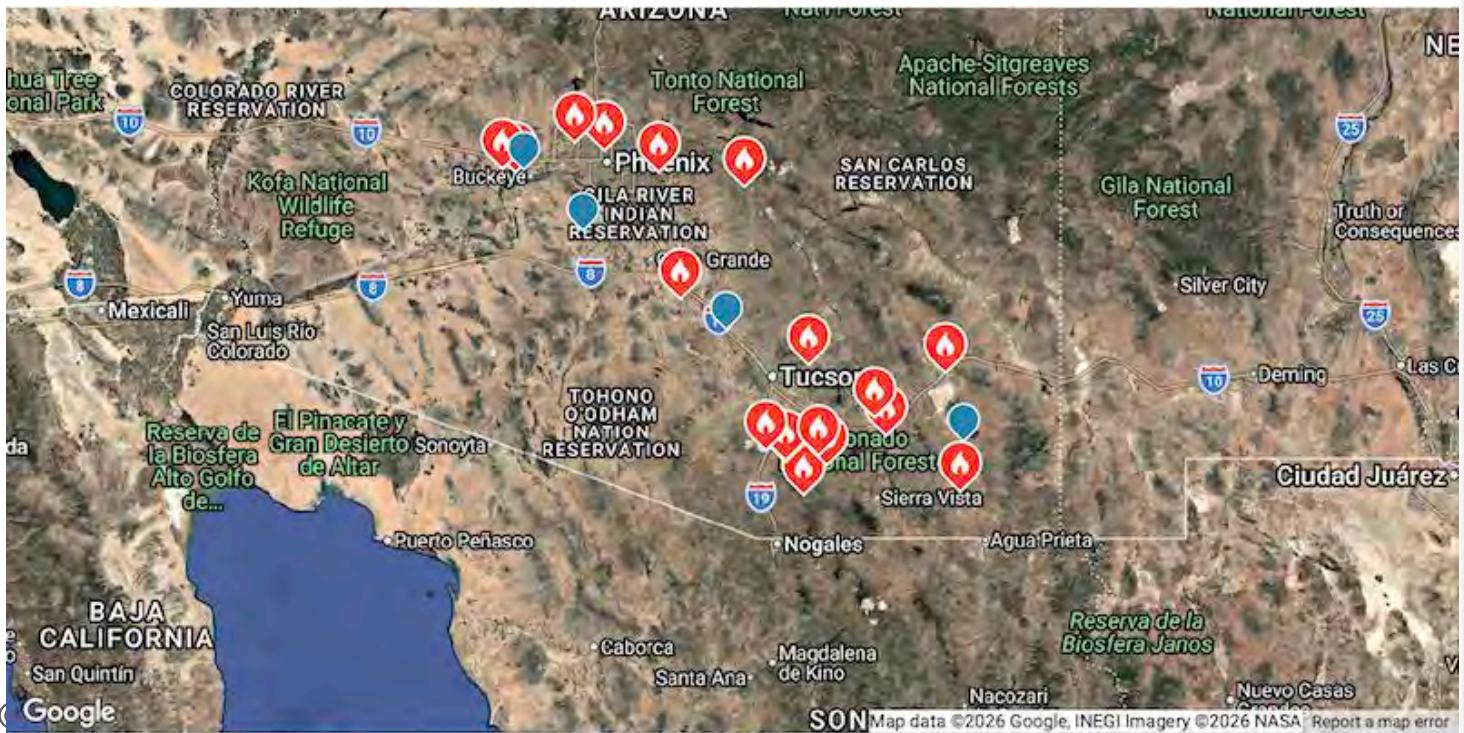
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-- Cory Gregory (Curlew)



Field Guides Birding Tours -- ARIZONA WINTER SPECIALTIES, 2025 (with Cory Gregory)

27 Dec 2025 – 1 Jan 2026 (6 days) Link-only



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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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22

26

Species Observed

Show all details

14	Snow Goose <i>Anser caerulescens</i>	►  2
5	Ross's Goose <i>Anser rossii</i>	►  1
115	Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i>	►  2
15	Cinnamon Teal <i>Spatula cyanoptera</i>	►  2
188	Northern Shoveler <i>Spatula clypeata</i>	►  5
28	Gadwall <i>Mareca strepera</i>	►  4
268	American Wigeon <i>Mareca americana</i>	►  7
134	Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	►  9
3	Mexican Duck <i>Anas diazi</i>	►  1
152	Northern Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	►  3
146	Green-winged Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	►  3
277	Canvasback <i>Aythya valisineria</i>	►  2
168	Ring-necked Duck <i>Aythya collaris</i>	►  1  4
5	Bufflehead <i>Bucephala albeola</i>	►  1
8	Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	►  3
13	Gambel's Quail <i>Callipepla gambelii</i>	►  2
17	Wild Turkey <i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	►  2
80	Rock Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i> *	►  2
64	Eurasian Collared-Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> *	►  6
6	Inca Dove <i>Columbina inca</i>	►  1
14	White-winged Dove <i>Zenaidura asiatica</i>	►  2

61	Mourning Dove <i>Zenaida macroura</i>	►  7
1	Greater Roadrunner <i>Geococcyx californianus</i>	►  1  1
2	Rivoli's Hummingbird <i>Eugenes fulgens</i>	►  1
11	Anna's Hummingbird <i>Calypte anna</i>	►  5
3	Costa's Hummingbird <i>Calypte costae</i>	►  2  1
1	Violet-crowned Hummingbird <i>Ramosomyia violiceps</i>	►  1  1
1	Virginia Rail <i>Rallus limicola</i>	►  1
3	Sora <i>Porzana carolina</i>	►  5  2
70	American Coot <i>Fulica americana</i>	►  7
2500	Sandhill Crane <i>Antigone canadensis</i>	►  1
17	Black-necked Stilt <i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	►  3
35	Killdeer <i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	►  7
322	Long-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	►  3
2	Spotted Sandpiper <i>Actitis macularius</i>	►  1
53	Greater Yellowlegs <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	►  3
125	Least Sandpiper <i>Calidris minutilla</i>	►  5
3	Ring-billed Gull <i>Larus delawarensis</i>	►  2
5	Pied-billed Grebe <i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	►  1  4
1	Eared Grebe <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	►  1
7	Double-crested Cormorant <i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	►  3
10	Neotropic Cormorant <i>Nannopterum brasilianum</i>	►  2
80	White-faced Ibis <i>Plegadis chihi</i>	►  1
10	Snowy Egret <i>Egretta thula</i>	►  2
5	Great Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>	►  2

14	Great Blue Heron <i>Ardea herodias</i>	►  5
3	Turkey Vulture <i>Cathartes aura</i>	►  1
1	Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	►  1
1	Sharp-shinned Hawk <i>Accipiter striatus</i>	►  1
1	Cooper's Hawk <i>Astur cooperii</i>	►  1
2	Northern Harrier <i>Circus hudsonius</i>	►  2
2	Harris's Hawk <i>Parabuteo unicinctus</i>	►  1
11	Red-tailed Hawk <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	►  5
3	Ferruginous Hawk <i>Buteo regalis</i>	►  2
2	Burrowing Owl <i>Athene cunicularia</i>	►  2
1	Northern Saw-whet Owl <i>Aegolius acadicus</i>	►  1
1	Coppery-tailed Tropicbird <i>Trogon ambiguus</i>	►  1
1	Lewis's Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	►  1
15	Acorn Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>	►  2
9	Gila Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i>	►  4
4	Ladder-backed Woodpecker <i>Dryobates scalaris</i>	►  3
1	Arizona Woodpecker <i>Leuconotopicus arizonae</i>	►  1
2	Northern Flicker <i>Colaptes auratus</i>	►  2
5	American Kestrel <i>Falco sparverius</i>	►  1
1	Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	►  1
1	Prairie Falcon <i>Falco mexicanus</i>	►  1
18	Rosy-faced Lovebird <i>Agapornis roseicollis</i> *	►  1
1	Dusky Flycatcher <i>Empidonax oberholseri</i>	►  1

11	Black Phoebe <i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	►  6
4	Say's Phoebe <i>Sayornis saya</i>	►  4
3	Vermilion Flycatcher <i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>	►  3
4	Loggerhead Shrike <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	►  3
1	Steller's Jay <i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>	►  1
17	Mexican Jay <i>Aphelocoma wollweberi</i>	►  1
12	Chihuahuan Raven <i>Corvus cryptoleucus</i>	►  1
14	Common Raven <i>Corvus corax</i>	►  6
9	Bridled Titmouse <i>Baeolophus wollweberi</i>	►  2
1	Juniper Titmouse <i>Baeolophus ridgwayi</i>	►  1
3	Verdin <i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>	►  2
29	Horned Lark <i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	►  1  4
2	Tree Swallow <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	►  1
2	Northern Rough-winged Swallow <i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	►  1
12	Ruby-crowned Kinglet <i>Corthylio calendula</i>	►  6
6	White-breasted Nuthatch <i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	►  3
1	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher <i>Polioptila caerulea</i>	►  1
2	Black-tailed Gnatcatcher <i>Polioptila melanura</i>	►  2  1
1	Canyon Wren <i>Catherpes mexicanus</i>	►  1
4	Marsh Wren <i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	►  1
3	Bewick's Wren <i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	►  2  2
83	European Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	►  3
5	Curve-billed Thrasher <i>Toxostoma curvirostre</i>	►  1  4

1	Bendire's Thrasher <i>Toxostoma bendirei</i>	►   
5	Northern Mockingbird <i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	►  2
4	Western Bluebird <i>Sialia mexicana</i>	►  1
5	Mountain Bluebird <i>Sialia currucoides</i>	►  1
7	Hermit Thrush <i>Catharus guttatus</i>	►  2
5	American Robin <i>Turdus migratorius</i>	►  1
1	Rufous-backed Robin <i>Turdus rufopalliatus</i>	►  1
1	Phainopepla <i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	►  1
43	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> *	►  6
6	American Pipit <i>Anthus rubescens</i>	►  4
1	Sprague's Pipit <i>Anthus spragueii</i>	►  1
10	House Finch <i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	►  4
5	Pine Siskin <i>Spinus pinus</i>	►  1
18	Lesser Goldfinch <i>Spinus psaltria</i>	►  2
50	Lawrence's Goldfinch <i>Spinus lawrencei</i>	►   1
1	American Goldfinch <i>Spinus tristis</i>	►  1
120	Chestnut-collared Longspur <i>Calcarius ornatus</i>	►   1
1	Chipping Sparrow <i>Spizella passerina</i>	►  1
2	Brewer's Sparrow <i>Spizella breweri</i>	►  1
5	Lark Sparrow <i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	►   1
225	Lark Bunting <i>Calamospiza melanocorys</i>	►   1
4	Dark-eyed Junco <i>Junco hyemalis</i>	►  1
1	Yellow-eyed Junco <i>Junco phaeonotus</i>	►  1

62	White-crowned Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	► 6
5	Sagebrush Sparrow <i>Artemisiospiza nevadensis</i>	► 1
43	Vesper Sparrow <i>Pooecetes gramineus</i>	► 1 2
28	Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	► 5
3	Song Sparrow <i>Melospiza melodia</i>	► 1
3	Lincoln's Sparrow <i>Melospiza lincolni</i>	► 3
13	Abert's Towhee <i>Melozone aberti</i>	► 6
3	Spotted Towhee <i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	► 2
20	Yellow-headed Blackbird <i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>	► 1
5	Western Meadowlark <i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	► 1
5	Chihuahuan Meadowlark <i>Sturnella lilianae</i>	► 3
316	Red-winged Blackbird <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	► 4
9	Brown-headed Cowbird <i>Molothrus ater</i>	► 1
525	Brewer's Blackbird <i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	► 2
180	Great-tailed Grackle <i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	► 6
4	Common Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	► 2
7	Yellow-rumped Warbler <i>Setophaga coronata</i>	► 3
2	Black-throated Gray Warbler <i>Setophaga nigrescens</i>	► 1 2
1	Townsend's Warbler <i>Setophaga townsendi</i>	► 1
1	Painted Redstart <i>Myioborus pictus</i>	► 1
2	Hepatic Tanager <i>Piranga flava</i>	► 1
7	Northern Cardinal <i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	► 1 3
1	Pyrrhuloxia <i>Cardinalis sinuatus</i>	► 1

HYBRIDS

1 Red-naped x Red-breasted Sapsucker (hybrid) *Sphyrapicus nuchalis x ruber*  2  1

ADDITIONAL TAXA

12 Domestic goose sp. (Domestic type) *Anser sp. (Domestic type)*   1

1 hummingbird sp. *Trochilidae sp.*   1

4 raven sp. *Corvus sp. (raven sp.)*   2

2 swallow sp. *Hirundinidae sp.*   1

3 Western/Chihuahuan Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta/lilianae*   1