



Field Guides Tour Report

Northern Arizona's Canyons and Condor 2015

May 30, 2015 to Jun 4, 2015

John Coons

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.



One of the greatest spectacles on earth, the Grand Canyon is so vast that it's difficult to capture photographically. It has to be seen in person! Photo by guide John Coons.

With all of the birds and vast scenery we encountered, this tour to Northern Arizona seemed to be over much too quickly. Each of our birding days was varied, with vastly different habitats and new species -- starting on our first afternoon, when we had wonderful looks at an American Three-toed Woodpecker at the edge of a forest fire burn. Highlights of the trip were many, and included a perched Bald Eagle within sight of our motel, a two-week-old Common Black-Hawk being attended to by its parents, a Lewis's Woodpecker at a nest hole, a colorful Williamson's Sapsucker, Dusky and Gray flycatchers, close views of Gray Vireos, even closer views of Pinyon Jays, a brilliant Mountain Bluebird finally showing itself, Olive Warbler, a singing Virginia's Warbler, several Red-faced Warblers, Painted Redstart, a teed up Black-chinned Sparrow, a Yellow-headed Blackbird playing centerfield, and a male Bighorn Sheep atop a rock formation in the Grand Canyon. Our experience with those California Condors was certainly the most memorable aspect of the trip. Two birds seen soaring at a good distance prompted a quick pace along the Grand Canyon's South Rim, and we soon saw two adult condors riding thermals below us, then landing on a ledge, where we enjoyed them for 30 minutes. Out of the blue, an immature condor arrived and joined them, and the three continued to hang out. Watching these birds over the vastness of the canyon was inspiring.

While perhaps not comparable to the Grand Canyon, the Red Rock Country of the Sedona area and Oak Creek Canyon, and the still-snowcapped San Francisco Peaks were also captured by many pixels. Jim's suggestion that we watch the passing of the International Space Station over the clear, unlit Flagstaff skies led to another memorable occasion of the trip. It was all great fun and I hope to see you again soon for another birding adventure. -- John

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – We saw many of these around the lake in Flagstaff. Formerly only a winter bird, this species began

summering a few years ago and it didn't take long before there were goslings following Mom around.

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – We had a view of a male in Oak Creek near Page Springs.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – A single bird was seen at the Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – A real beauty, this mostly western duck species showed well at the Kachina Wetlands.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas crecca*)

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – A single individual was seen at the Kachina Wetlands.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – It was a bit of a surprise to see five individuals at the pond in Flagstaff. They should have been well north by now.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – There were several at the Kachina Wetlands where we saw the males in display with their electric blue bills.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

GAMBEL'S QUAIL (*Callipepla gambelii*) [*]

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – We saw a few at Kachina Wetlands where there were young birds with stripes on the head.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – A relatively new addition to the Flagstaff area avifauna we saw a handful in the area.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Our only ones were in the Page Springs area.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – We saw a good number at the Grand Canyon where they were dwarfed in size by the following...

CALIFORNIA CONDOR (*Gymnogyps californianus*) – We had a great experience seeing this giant majestic bird at the Grand Canyon. We spotted two birds flying at a distance and saw them go behind a point of rock so we hustled along the South Rim and saw them soaring just below us before alighting on a rock ledge. These were two adults (J1 and E3) that were ultimately joined by an immature bird (09). We enjoyed them for some time as they basked in the sun below us. There is no better way to see a condor than with the Grand Canyon as a backdrop. Yip! Yip! Yip!

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We had several sightings including nests at the Kachina Wetlands, one at the south edge of Flagstaff, and a newly constructed nest at the pond near our motel.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – We saw one fly past us along Schultz Pass Road.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – We enjoyed nice views of a perched adult in all its regalness at the ponds near the motel. I have since learned it has a nest about 1-2 miles away.

COMMON BLACK HAWK (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) – We had great views of nest with a two week old chick at John & Becky's house. We watched the parents bring food in a few times. We later saw a pair at the fish hatchery and then again in Oak Creek Canyon.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – We encountered several during the week.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – There were several calling at the Kachina Wetlands but we could not get one in to view. [*]

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) [*]

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – It was somewhat of a surprise to see this bird at the Kachina Wetlands all by himself. It is not a frequent visitor here.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

MEW GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [H]

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) [H]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaidura macroura*)

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – We saw a few at the Grand Canyon and again in Oak Creek Canyon but they were mostly at a distance.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

MAGNIFICENT HUMMINGBIRD (*Eugenes fulgens*) – A male came in to the feeders at John and Becky's cabin in Oak Creek Canyon. This is a quite local bird here and at the very northern limit of its range in Arizona.

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*) – We had good views of males and females at feeders.

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna*) – We saw a female coming to the feeders at John and Becky's house.

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – With our visit to Hart Prairie we probably saw more of these than any of the other hummingbirds.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – A male bird made an appearance along Oak Creek at John and Becky's house. There are very few breeding records of this bird in Arizona and this was a likely candidate.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – We had great views of this quite unusual looking woodpecker at a nest hole right in Flagstaff. A quite colorful bird it flies more like a crow than a woodpecker.

ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – We saw a few of these colorful woodpeckers.

GILA WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes uropygialis*) – A more desert dweller than the other woodpeckers, we had good views of one in the cottonwoods along lower Oak Creek.

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – We had great looks at this beautiful woodpecker near Hart Prairie where it probably was near a nest hole. We later saw a female, which looks very different, further along the road.

RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – A male showed well in Hart Prairie where this bird is only known to nest in aspens in the area.

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*) – Good views of a pair along lower Oak Creek.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – One of the least common woodpeckers in the area, we saw one along Hart Prairie Road.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Though we only saw a few this is the most widespread woodpecker, except for flicker, in the Flagstaff area.

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides dorsalis*) – We had great looks at a yellow-capped male then a female at the upper end of Oak Creek Canyon. A very local bird in Arizona it was taking advantage of the recent forest fire where it specializes on the insects working in the burned trees.

NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus cafer*) – These are all of the "red-shafted" form, the one that is widespread in the west.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – We saw a couple or three in our travels.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*) – A common voice in the forest we saw a few in Hart Prairie and along Lake Mary Road.

GRAY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax wrightii*) – It took some searching but we found a calling bird south of Flagstaff.

DUSKY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax oberholseri*) – Great views of several birds in the Hart Prairie area where this species was first described. Its preferred habitat is somewhat open damp meadows with willows present.

CORDILLERAN FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax occidentalis*) – This is the relatively common small forest flycatcher in the pine forests of the area.

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*) – Our sightings were all along Oak Creek.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – Our first, at the Kachina Wetlands, was near a nest under one of the buildings.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – We got good views of a male of this dazzling species in a horse pasture near Page Springs. Not a common species in the area but there are a few around here.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) – We had these in the drier country near the Grand Canyon and south of Sedona.

BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – Great looks at a pair in the riparian trees at John and Becky's house along Oak Creek.

CASSIN'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus vociferans*)

WESTERN KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – Our first views were at the Cameron Trading Post where they nest in the taller trees of the courtyard.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

BELL'S VIREO (*Vireo bellii*) – We had great looks at this nondescript species near the creek south of Sedona.

GRAY VIREO (*Vireo vicinior*) – We enjoyed great looks at this local specialty in the pinyon-juniper slopes of Gray Mountain just outside of Grand Canyon. This is a species that is not often seen along the routes of the conventional birding tours.

PLUMBEOUS VIREO (*Vireo plumbeus*) – We saw a few and this is a common voice of the pine forests.

WARBLING VIREO (*Vireo gilvus*) – A few were in the aspens in the Hart Prairie area.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – We had close visits from a couple of birds at the water feature on our deck before dinner and they serenaded us during dinner. Another local species that is out of the way of most birding trips.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)

WESTERN SCRUB-JAY (*Aphelocoma californica*)

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – We had a quiet bird, which was surprising alone, overhead in a conifer in the Hart Prairie area.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Most sightings were in the Flagstaff area and immediate area.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – More widespread than American Crows around here we saw a number at the Grand Canyon where they were soaring with the Turkey Vultures.

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – We had a few flying about the Oak Creek area.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – We saw a couple of these rather local birds at the Kachina Wetlands.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – Very common throughout and especially well seen at the Grand Canyon.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – We saw one on our last afternoon flying over the pond near the motel.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*)

BRIDLED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) – We only ended up with some quick looks south of Flagstaff.

JUNIPER TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*)

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*) – This true desert dweller showed well at John and Becky's house along Oak Creek.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (*Psaltriparus minimus*) – We had several encounters with this acrobatic species in the juniper habitat.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) [*]

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – Our first was going in to a hole in a building at the Kachina Wetlands.

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*) – This is a rather common bird in the ponderosa pine of the area. We saw them a handful of times.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – These were especially noisy in the upper end of Oak Creek Canyon.

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

CACTUS WREN (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*) – We had two calling individuals that we spotted in a juniper south of Flagstaff at one of the most northerly spots they occur in mid-Arizona.

Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) [*]

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*) – A daily occurrence we saw these in all but the lowest elevation habitats we visited.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – After looking for them in several places we finally had a gorgeous male on a snag along Lake Mary Road.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – A couple of these beautiful songsters were seen and heard in the Hart Prairie area.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Our only sighting was in the juniper habitat south of Flagstaff.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Ptilionotidae (Silky-flycatchers)

PHAINOPEPLA (*Phainopepla nitens*) – A few were about John and Becky's house and at Page Springs. This is a bird that moves up to the high desert after breeding further south.

Peucedramidae (Olive Warbler)

OLIVE WARBLER (*Peucedramus taeniatus*) – We had very good views of a quite close individual that was probably a first year male. It was brighter on the head than a female and had a well defined dark gray cheek patch.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – We saw a singing bird in Hart Prairie where it is a quite local breeder.

LUCY'S WARBLER (*Oreothlypis luciae*) – We heard a good number in the lowlands but our best views were at Page Springs fish hatchery.

VIRGINIA'S WARBLER (*Oreothlypis virginiae*) – A quite cooperative singing individual was in Oak Creek Canyon.

MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) – We had scope views of a singing bird at Hart Prairie where this is a local breeder in the Bebb's Willows. Normally a skulker it was sitting right out singing in the open.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – A few were in the cattails and bulrush at Kachina Wetlands.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – Many were heard and a few seen in the riparian trees along lower Oak Creek.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*)

GRACE'S WARBLER (*Setophaga graciae*) – We had close views of a few in the pine forests. This is another bird often associated with SE Arizona but is quite common here.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – Great views at the Grand Canyon of singing birds near the Grandview Point overlook.

RED-FACED WARBLER (*Cardellina rubrifrons*) – Another stunner, we saw then several times in the pine and mixed conifer forests. This species is, perhaps, easier to see in the Flagstaff area than in southern Arizona.

PAINTED REDSTART (*Myioborus pictus*) – Nice looks at one right overhead in upper Oak Creek Canyon, another dazzler.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT (*Icteria virens*) – We enjoyed particularly good views of this often difficult species in the thick vegetation and trees of lower Oak Creek.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – A number were showing themselves well in Hart Prairie. This is a local breeder in Northern Arizona and Hart Prairie is one of the best spots for them.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

ABERT'S TOWHEE (*Melospiza aberti*) – Always near a creek, we saw a few at John and Becky's where they even came to the feeder.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW (*Spizella atrogularis*) – Great views of another local bird on the slopes of Gray Mountain soon after leaving Grand Canyon.

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*) – A fair number were perched atop mullein plants and singing in Hart Prairie.

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*) – We had a couple of brief views in the forest near Mormon Lake.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*)

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)

DARK-EYED JUNCO (RED-BACKED) (*Junco hyemalis dorsalis*) – This subspecies, "dorsalis" is the dark-billed race that breeds through central and northern Arizona.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

HEPATIC Tanager (*Piranga flava*) – A young male was calling in the pine-oak forest south of Flagstaff and we ended up with good views. It was more yellow with a more conspicuous gray check patch than a female would show.

SUMMER Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)

WESTERN Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – We encountered several during the week in the pine forests and in the mulberries in the lowlands.

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Though most birders don't expect these in the high desert they are not uncommon just south of Sedona.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) – We saw a few with our first one in Hart Prairie being a leucistic individual that showed a lot of excess white in the wing and head.

BLUE GROSBEAK (*Passerina caerulea*) – Our only one was a male on the fence wire at the edge of the horse pasture near Page Springs.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*)

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – One of our early birds, we saw the one on the centerfield fence at Kachina Village a couple of times.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – These were not seen far from the city.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

HOODED ORIOLE (*Icterus cucullatus*) – A couple of birds were at John and Becky's place.

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE (*Icterus bullockii*)

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – We enjoyed great views of about six individuals that were coming down from the tall pines to get a drink from the puddle at our stop at the Grand Canyon. There were males, young males and females present. It is rare to see them so well around here.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – This was a big Pine Siskin year and we saw them in many locations.

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [H]

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – This was the cottontail that was seen in the higher elevations.

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – A few were seen in the Sedona / Oak Creek areas.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*) – It was a bit of a surprise to see one loping along next to the road in Hart Prairie. This is not a common sight in the pine woodlands of Northern Arizona.

CLIFF CHIPMUNK (*Tamias dorsalis*) – This is the chipmunk we saw scurrying over the rocks and walls at the Grand Canyon.

ROCK SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus variegatus*)

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus lateralis*) – Our only sighting was at the Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon.

GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) – A few were in the dog walking area next to the motel, though I don't think they had these "dogs" in mind.

ABERT'S SQUIRREL (*Sciurus aberti*) – A local specialty, we saw a few in the pine forests. This is the darker tailed form that is south of the Grand Canyon while the "Kaibab" form on the North Rim has a much whiter tail.

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*) – We scoped a group of at least 27 in the Mormon Lake basin.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*) – We saw a couple of these handsome open-country mammals on our drive to the Grand Canyon. This is supposed to be the fastest mammal in North America.

BIGHORN SHEEP (*Ovis canadensis*) – We were quite fortunate to see one perched atop a pinnacle at Lipan Point in the Grand Canyon.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 140 bird taxa and 12 mammal taxa