



Field Guides Tour Report

Northern Arizona's Canyons and Condor II 2018

Jun 8, 2018 to Jun 13, 2018

John Coons

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



The Grand Canyon never disappoints in its spectacular views and changing colors. Photo by guide John Coons.

Our time in Northern Arizona covered a variety of habitats in relatively close proximity to our base in Flagstaff. Pine forests, deep canyons, tall creekside trees, and rocky deserts were all birded. Despite not being able to reach the higher elevations of the San Francisco Peaks due to the Forest Service closing parts of the mountain due to forest fire danger, we still birded from about 3000 to 8000 feet in elevation. This allowed us to see Black-throated Sparrows and Verdins at the low end and Clark's Nutcrackers and Red-faced Warblers at the higher elevations.

Sightings of California Condor have been inconsistent at the South Rim this spring, so we elected to drive north on our first morning to some reliable sites for seeing this magnificent bird. At Navajo Bridge over the Colorado River we couldn't find any condors, so we continued to the Vermilion Cliffs, another 25 miles along the road. Here, we spotted several individuals perched, and and some soaring above the distant cliff as more and more condors seemed to appear. We reached a high count of at least sixteen individuals perched at one time, a pretty high percentage of the entire Arizona/Utah population. This was a great experience but it was added to on the day we visited the Grand Canyon when an adult California Condor flew over us while we were leaving the visitor's center near Mather Point. Oh, and the Grand Canyon itself was pretty special, too.

Other highlights were many, and included gorgeous Cinnamon Teal, a perched Common Black Hawk, two soaring Zone-tailed Hawks at the Grand Canyon, a pair of very confiding Virginia Rails, a male Rivoli's Hummingbird, a beautiful Lewis's Woodpecker, Gray Flycatcher, a family of Vermilion Flycatchers, a very cooperative singing Gray Vireo, a group of 40+ Pinyon Jays, close Clark's Nutcrackers on the rim of the Grand Canyon, dapper Bridled Titmice, a beautiful Canyon Wren, a couple of pairs of sky-blue Mountain Bluebirds, great looks at the odd Olive Warbler, Virginia's, Grace's, and Red-faced warblers all in about 20 minutes, Painted Redstart, Black-chinned Sparrow, Summer and Western tanagers, and a number of Yellow-headed Blackbirds, among others. We even finished up with a herd of Elk on our last afternoon.

It was great fun birding with all of you and sharing some of the wonderful country of Northern Arizona. I look forward to doing it again soon. 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 =

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl).

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – We saw many in the Flagstaff area, where some had goslings. This species did not breed here until about 6-7 years ago.

CINNAMON TEAL (*Spatula cyanoptera*) – A few of these colorful western ducks were spotted.

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*) – There was a pair at the Kachina Wetlands.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – We had a single female at Kachina Wetlands.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – A single individual flew over us as we birded along lower Oak Creek. This species breeds uncommonly along the creek.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – We saw a few, including the males with the bright blue bills.

Podicipedidae (Grebes).

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags).

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – A single bird was seen at Lake Elaine in Flagstaff.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns).

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures).

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – We saw these each day.

CALIFORNIA CONDOR (*Gymnogyps californianus*) – On our first day, we made a special trip to find this huge bird. We saw several distant birds at the top of the Vermilion Cliffs with more flying around. Eventually, we saw at least 16 individuals perched, with possibly as many as 3-5 more hiding amongst the junipers. Two days later while leaving the visitor's center at the Grand Canyon, Jill spotted an adult that flew right past us. The Visitor's Center is in an area where sightings have been very inconsistent recently.

Pandionidae (Osprey).

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We saw four at Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon, as well as a pair at a nest near our motel in Flagstaff.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites).

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – We had two quick views, including one that took a run at the Pinyon Jays.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – An adult perched in a tall snag near our hotel gave us a great view one morning.

COMMON BLACK HAWK (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) – We had great views of a calling bird perched in a tree right along Oak Creek at John and Becky's house.

ZONE-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo albonotatus*) – At the Grand Canyon, we had a view of a soaring bird near the visitor's center and another at Desert View. This species has increased in numbers here in recent years.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots).

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – We enjoyed great views of two individuals at the Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

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

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – We saw a few each day.

Apodidae (Swifts).

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – We had a few good views of individuals flying past and over the Grand Canyon.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds).

RIVOLI'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Eugenes fulgens*) – A male appeared at a feeder in Oak Creek Canyon. This is as far north as this species gets in the U.S.

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*) – We saw a few on a nearly daily basis.

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna*) – A male was perched in a fruit tree at John and Becky's house south of Sedona.

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – This is the common breeding hummingbird in the mountains around Flagstaff. There were several birds coming to the feeders in Oak Creek Canyon.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers).

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – It was a bit of a surprise to see this species perched on a wire over lower Oak Creek. There are only a few recent breeding records for the whole state of Arizona and this is perfect habitat.

Picidae (Woodpeckers).

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – We had good views of one of two birds on our first morning. This beautiful bird has colors that you don't see on other birds.

ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – Dan spotted out first in upper Oak Creek.

GILA WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes uropygialis*) – This desert species was seen in the tall cottonwoods and sycamores along lower Oak Creek.

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*) – Another lower elevation species that we saw at John and Becky's house in lower Oak Creek.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus cafer*)

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*)

GRAY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax wrightii*) – Soon after we started looking for this locally uncommon species, Jill spotted it in a juniper. We ended up with scope views of a calling bird.

CORDILLERAN FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax occidentalis*) – This is the local breeding *Empidonax* flycatcher in the pine forests of the Flagstaff area. We saw a few during the week.

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*) – Generally found along creeks and ponds, we saw a couple of individuals along Oak Creek.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – This was one of our first birds as we started birding at the Kachina Wetlands. We saw a few recent fledgling with pinkish gapes hanging around a couple of adults.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – A rather uncommon species this far north. We saw a colorful male with a female and what seemed to be a couple of young birds while we birded along lower Oak Creek Canyon.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) – A couple of individuals were seen in the pinyon pine and juniper habitat right near the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – A couple of vocal birds were seen in the sycamores at John and Becky's house.

CASSIN'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus vociferans*) – Our best view was near Gray Mountain after we left the Grand Canyon.

WESTERN KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – A pair showed well at the Cameron Trading Post during both of our visits.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

GRAY VIREO (*Vireo vicinior*) – A quite local specialty, a singing bird showed very well for us near Gray Mountain and then again the next day south of Flagstaff.

YELLOW-THROATED VIREO (*Vireo flavifrons*) – A rarity throughout the state, we heard but couldn't get a look at a singing bird in Oak Creek Canyon, where it has set up a territory for the last three summers. [*]

PLUMBEOUS VIREO (*Vireo plumbeus*) – This quite gray species that is closely related to the Blue-headed Vireo of the east, showed well a couple of times.

WARBLING VIREO (*Vireo gilvus*) [*]

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – We ended up getting great views of up to 40 individuals visiting a water feature near the Grand Canyon. This is usually a conspicuous bird around Flagstaff but they have not been present this year.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – This species was a daily sighting in the pine forests.

WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB-JAY (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*) – This Great Basin specialty showed very well at the Grand Canyon, where we saw at least one adult with some juveniles right near the visitor's center.

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – I thought we were going to miss this species, since we could not get to the San Francisco Peaks due to the forest being closed because of fire danger. But, this turned out to be a big year for them at the Grand Canyon. After seeing a couple of fly-overs as we drove through the park, we had close views of several birds at Desert View.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – In Arizona, this species is really only common around Flagstaff.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – A quite local breeder in Northern Arizona. We saw a couple of individuals flying about at the Kachina Wetlands.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – This is the common swallow around Flagstaff.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – A few had nests around our motel in Flagstaff.

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – Jill spotted one on our first day.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*)

BRIDLED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) – A quite handsome species. We had looks at them Cave Springs area in Oak Creek Canyon.

JUNIPER TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – We found a new best site for this species.... at the restrooms at the Grand Canyon visitor's center.

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*) – This desert species showed well at John and Becky's place south of Sedona.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (*Psaltriparus minimus*) – A family group came in quite close to us near Mather Point at Grand Canyon.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*)

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*) – Our first were at the Kachina Wetlands, then we saw this tiny bird a few other times.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – Near Gray Mountain, we watched one bounding up and down from a rock outcropping.

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – This bird with a great song and one of the iconic sounds of the southwest showed well for us in Oak Creek Canyon.

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – We had a few, with a good view of one on the big brush pile.

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*)

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – We saw two pairs in Kendrick Park on our way to the Grand Canyon; one pair with at least two juveniles.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Dan saw our first at Cameron.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Ptilionotidae (Silky-flycatchers)

PHAINOPEPLA (*Phainopepla nitens*) – This unusual species was feeding on small mulberry fruits along lower Oak Creek.

Peucedramidae (Olive Warbler)

OLIVE WARBLER (*Peucedramus taeniatus*) – It didn't take long for us to find this quite special bird of the pine forests. We had nice looks at an adult male with an orange head and black ear patch. This species has been a taxonomic enigma for a long time and was recently placed in its own family.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

LUCY'S WARBLER (*Oreothlypis luciae*) – It seems unusual to see this quite desert loving species way up Oak Creek Canyon. We saw a singing bird at Cave Springs.

VIRGINIA'S WARBLER (*Oreothlypis virginiae*) – We had nice looks at this range-restricted species at the upper end of Oak Creek Canyon.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – We saw a couple and heard more along the riparian stretches of Oak Creek.

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

GRACE'S WARBLER (*Setophaga graciae*) – Another pine forest specialty. We had good views in upper Oak Creek Canyon.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – This pinyon pine-juniper habitat species showed well at the South Rim of Grand Canyon.

RED-FACED WARBLER (*Cardellina rubrifrons*) – One of the great looking warblers of the Southwest. We saw a singing bird quite well in upper Oak Creek Canyon.

PAINTED REDSTART (*Myioborus pictus*) – It took a bit of time to find this mostly riparian species in Oak Creek Canyon, but we finally had very nice views of this red-breasted species.

Passerellidae (New World Buntings and Sparrows)

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – A rather common local breeder. We saw our first on the fence at Kachina Wetlands.

BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW (*Spizella atrogularis*) – This species likes chaparral habitat in the junipers. We had great views of a singing bird near Gray Mountain. The next day we saw one along Stoneman Lake Road.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – One of the more sharply marked sparrows. We saw our first one at Navajo Bridge on our first day.

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*)

DARK-EYED JUNCO (RED-BACKED) (*Junco hyemalis dorsalis*) – This is the form that was called Gray-headed Junco many years ago. This subspecies breeds in Northern Arizona south of the Grand Canyon.

VESPER SPARROW (*Poocetes gramineus*) – A few singing individuals were heard, and we had a nice look at one of a fence wire at Kendrick Park.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Our best view was of the one walking about on the pond vegetation at the Page Springs fish hatchery.

ABERT'S TOWHEE (*Melospiza aberti*) – Another quite local species in Northern Arizona, this species is found along creeks and this is exactly where we saw it along lower Oak Creek.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

Icteriidae (Yellow-breasted Chat)

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT (*Icteria virens*) – This well-known species is another "warbler" that was recently placed in its own family because of new physiological, taxonomical and DNA data. We had a good look at this skulker along lower Oak Creek.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

HEPATIC TANAGER (*Piranga flava*) – We had one singing near Gray Mountain but could not get a view of it. [*]

SUMMER TANAGER (*Piranga rubra*) – We saw a female at Cave Springs, and both a female and brilliant male that really showed off for us at John and Becky's house.

WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – Our first was a migrant male at Cameron, then we saw another male and a female at Stoneman Lake.

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – We had a singing individual at John and Becky's house.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies).

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – We had several colorful males and a few females at the Kachina Wetlands.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*)

HOODED ORIOLE (*Icterus cucullatus*) – A female made a brief appearance at John and Becky's house.

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE (*Icterus bullockii*) – Both a male and female joined us for dinner in Flagstaff when they visited the hummingbird feeder.

SCOTT'S ORIOLE (*Icterus parisorum*) – A nicely plumaged male and a singing female-plumaged bird showed for us near Gray Mountain.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – We saw most of these on lawns right in Flagstaff.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Seen daily.

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – We heard a couple flying over at Grandview at the Grand Canyon. [*]

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows).

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

MAMMALS

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)

CLIFF CHIPMUNK (*Tamias dorsalis*) – A few were seen at the overlooks at the Grand Canyon.

ROCK SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – We saw several, with our best views at the Grand Canyon where they were all rather confiding and chubby.

GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) – Near Mormon Lake we saw a handful of these well-known critters at their burrows.

ARIZONA GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus arizonensis*) – This riparian species and near-endemic for Arizona was seen along lower Oak Creek.

ABERT'S SQUIRREL (*Sciurus aberti*) – Wendy saw one of these handsome squirrels in the forest above Oak Creek Canyon.

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*) – We saw about 40, including several antlered males, grazing in the dry bed of Mormon Lake.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 119 bird taxa and 8 mammal taxa