



Field Guides Tour Report

Northern Arizona's Canyons and Condor I 2019

Jun 1, 2019 to Jun 7, 2019

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



The Grand Canyon never disappoints in its sheer beauty. Here at the South Rim, we had spectacular panoramas of the canyon while we successfully scanned for Zone-tailed Hawk. Photo by participant Walter Ammann.

When most birders think of Arizona, they think of trogons, hummingbirds and Sulfur-bellied Flycatchers in the southeast corner of the state; however, the forests and woodlands of the northern half of the state also make for some rich springtime birding. For this short, Flagstaff-based tour, we racked up numerous specialty birds like Lewis's and Three-toed Woodpeckers, breeding MacGillivray's Warbler, and of course California Condor, in some of Arizona's most breathtaking landscapes. It was my first run of the tour, and having grown up in Prescott, just 2 hours down the hill from Flagstaff, I was glad to be able to co-lead a tour in my "extended backyard."

Our first morning we birded the San Francisco Peaks – the majestic snow-covered mountains that dominate the Flagstaff horizon. Snow in June is not normal, but no weather these days is "normal" anymore. Nonetheless, we had had a beautiful snowy backdrop as we birded Hart Prairie, where we searched the soggy meadow for MacGillivray's Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee, Dusky Flycatcher, and Orange-crowned Warbler—all of which are localized breeders in this part of Arizona. John and I had scouted the day before and couldn't find a single Clark's Nutcracker, so we made all sorts of contingency plans if we missed them the day we went with the group. Luckily, we didn't need to fall back on those plans because we saw at least seven Nutcrackers that day at Hart Prairie, all calling and making a ruckus. Where were they hiding the day before?

Williamson's Sapsucker is a local breeder on the San Francisco Peaks. In my opinion it is the best looking of all the sapsuckers (sorry, Red-breasted!) with its uniform black upperparts, crisp white wing patch, red throat, and lemon-yellow belly. John and I found a responsive pair the day before the tour so we returned to the same area to see if they were around. It took a little while, but eventually we got nice views of the male as it spiraled up a trunk.

The Three-toed Woodpecker is another scarce Arizona woodpecker. I had only seen two in my 25 years of living in Arizona: one in the White Mountains and one in the Chuska Mountains in the northeast corner of the state. They are known for their affinity to burned sites and are somehow able to find fresh burns in the tremendous expanse of forest. It took us two visits to a burn site outside of Flagstaff to locate the birds, but when we finally saw them it was a tremendous view, as they allowed us to get close enough to count the toes!

One cannot visit northern Arizona without spending a day at the Grand Canyon—it is indeed one of the most dramatic landscapes in all of North America. We went with the intent of enjoying the vistas, and also finding condors, which sometimes make an appearance on the south rim. We searched and searched but couldn't find them, but a nesting pair of Zone-tailed Hawks wasn't too shabby. On our way back from the Canyon we made a few stops in Pinon Juniper woodland to find Gray Vireo. When we exited the van, we could hear one singing from inside a short Pinon. We got closer, but the sound didn't move. Hmmm. Eventually we got close enough to see the bird singing from its nest. Fantastic! Apparently, this behavior is shared among many vireos.

Having missed the condors at the Canyon, we thankfully had a back-up plan. From Flagstaff, we drove north to Navajo Bridge, which is one of the most reliable places to see condors in Arizona. There are actually two bridges, one for traffic and one for pedestrians. We walked out on the pedestrian bridge and, across the way, there it was: a California Condor roosting in the shade of the other bridge. While we were watching the condor, we heard the cry of a falcon from the distant cliff. We scanned the steep cliff side and saw a Peregrine perched on a white-wash-covered rock—perhaps its nest was back in one of the many caves that riddle the canyon wall.

Common Crane is an exceptionally rare bird in North America but, for the second year (the first being 2017), one of these majestic birds from Asia has made Mormon Lake its summer residence. From our first viewpoint of the lake, we scoped it out, but it was barely more than a few pixels on Walter's SLR image, to give an idea of how far away it was. We then drove to the other side of the lake and had far better views, albeit still distant, of the bird foraging in the wet meadow.

Our last day of the tour we dropped into the Verde Valley to look for some lower-elevation species. Rufous-crowned Sparrow and Scott's Oriole were welcome treats as we wrapped up a fun-filled week of birding.

John and I had a great time with all of you. We hope to cross paths again soon!

Micah

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*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Spatula cyanoptera*) – A few were at Kachina Wetlands. We watched them duck in and out of the cattails.

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*) – A nice looking drake was seen at Kachina Wetlands.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas crecca*) – We scoped a few at Mormon Lake.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – These were in bright breeding plumage.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – Quite a few were on Mormon Lake. This is one of the few places in Arizona where they breed.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

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

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus americanus*) – We had great views of one at Page Springs fish hatchery.

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – Lots of these acrobats were buzzing around at the Grand Canyon.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RIVOLI'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Eugenes fulgens*) – Seen well in Oak Creek Canyon. This is about the northern limit of their range.

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*) – When did hummingbirds get placed before shorebirds? This will take me a while to get used to.

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna*)

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – These were all over the place in Hart Prairie.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – Wow! One of these practically ran to our feet at Kachina Wetlands.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – The Virginia Rail chased it off at Kachina Wetlands.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Gruidae (Cranes)

COMMON CRANE (*Grus grus*) – In 2017 a Common Crane showed up at Mormon Lake, then it was reported again this year. We scoped it out on the south shore of the lake and watched in forage in the flooded grass.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies).

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – A few were breeding at Kachina Wetlands.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns).

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures).

CALIFORNIA CONDOR (*Gymnogyps californianus*) – After searching hard at the Grand Canyon, we drove up to Navajo Bridge where we saw a condor roosting in the shade of the bridge. Woohoo!

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey).

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites).

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Peggy spotted one as we were driving back from Navajo Bridge. It was soaring along a cliff. Way to go, Peggy!

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

COMMON BLACK HAWK (*Buteo gallus anthracinus*) – We had great views of the pair nesting at Page Springs.

ZONE-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo albonotatus*) – After hearing the birds call below us, we finally got on the pair at the Grand Canyon. They seemed to be in a courtship flight as they flew around with branches.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Picidae (Woodpeckers).

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – After a good deal of waiting around, the male came in and put on a show near the San Francisco Peaks.

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – This was the first bird of the trip! We had fabulous views of a pair attending a nest.

ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – We saw our first birds at Oak Creek Canyon.

GILA WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes uropygialis*) – Some were seen around Page Springs.

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides dorsalis*) – One of the coolest birds in Northern Arizona. These birds specialize on recently burned areas. We saw a pair just outside of Flagstaff.

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Dryobates scalaris*) – We saw several the day we went to Page Springs.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Dryobates villosus*)

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

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras).

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – We saw one calling from a cliff at Navajo Bridge. Perhaps it was nesting on one of the ledges.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers).

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus cooperi*) – We heard it calling and then followed the sound to where it was, at least 1/4 mile away. It's amazing how far that sound travels.

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*)

GRAY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax wrightii*) – We saw a few of these local breeders south of Flagstaff.

DUSKY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax oberholseri*) – Common at Hart Prairie. We watched one constructing a nest about 3 feet off the ground.

CORDILLERAN FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax occidentalis*) – We saw a few at the San Francisco Peaks.

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*)

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*)

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – We had up-close views at Page Springs. The female was feeding young that were hidden out of sight.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) – We saw our first one at the Grand Canyon and then a few later on.

BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – The larger, brighter *Myiarchus* seen at Page Springs. These are pretty much tied to riparian drainages in Arizona.

CASSIN'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus vociferans*)

WESTERN KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus verticalis*)

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis).

GRAY VIREO (*Vireo vicinior*) – We kept hearing the bird sing but it didn't seem to be moving. When we got within 5 ft of the source of the sound we realized it was singing from its nest! Apparently several vireos are known to sing from their nest like this one.

YELLOW-THROATED VIREO (*Vireo flavifrons*) – For the past couple years this bird has made Oak Creek Canyon its summer residence. We saw it well right before it started to rain on us.

PLUMBEOUS VIREO (*Vireo plumbeus*) – We had great view of a pair hopping around on the ground near the San Francisco Peaks. I presume they were collecting fibers for a nest.

WARBLING VIREO (*Vireo gilvus*) – Several were singing at Hart Prairie.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – We went to a spot near the Grand Canyon and saw a few in the Pinon Juniper woodland.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)

WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB-JAY (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*) – We finally caught up with this species south of Flagstaff.

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – Nutcrackers have been tricky this year, but we saw at least 7 in Hart Prairie.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

PURPLE MARTIN (*Progne subis*) – One lone male flew by at Kachina wetland.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – As we were leaving Kachina Wetlands, we spotted one way off on the other side of the pond. This is one of the few places in Arizona where they breed.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – By far the most common swallow of the tour. We saw them in multiple places including the Grand Canyon.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – A few were flying around at Navajo Bridge.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*)

BRIDLED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) – We saw a family group in the riparian area near Page Springs.

JUNIPER TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – We watched one singing from the top of a Juniper at the Grand Canyon.

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*)

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (*Psaltiriparus minimus*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – We saw one well at the San Francisco Peaks.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*)

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – One sang for us near the Grand Canyon.

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – A few of these were seen at the Grand Canyon. They are local breeders in Arizona.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – We saw some on the slopes of the San Francisco Peaks. They only breed at the highest elevations in Arizona.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*)

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*)

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*) – These local breeders were seen at the San Francisco Peaks.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*)

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

CRISSAL THRASHER (*Toxostoma crissale*) [*]

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)

Ptiliognatidae (Silky-flycatchers)

PHAINOPEPLA (*Phainopepla nitens*) – We saw a few south of Flagstaff. These mistletoe lovers will sometimes build their nest right in a clump of mistletoe.

Peucedramidae (Olive Warbler)

OLIVE WARBLER (*Peucedramus taeniatus*) – These are not actually warblers, but we still think they're cool. We had a close singing male near Flagstaff.

Eringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – There were a few flocks at Hart Prairie.

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*)

Passerellidae (New World Sparrows).

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW (*Spizella atrogularis*) – These dapper little sparrows nest in shrubby woodland and chaparral. We saw some near the Grand Canyon.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*)

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*)

DARK-EYED JUNCO (RED-BACKED) (*Junco hyemalis dorsalis*) – Fairly common throughout the tour, especially at the San Francisco Peaks.

VESPER SPARROW (*Poocetes gramineus*) – We saw quite a few at Hart Prairie and in the fields around Mormon Lake.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Several seen near Page Springs.

ABERT'S TOWHEE (*Melospiza aberti*) – This lowland towhee was seen near Page Springs.

RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW (*Aimophila ruficeps*) – We chased one around for a bit south of Flagstaff. This species tends to like rocky slopes.

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – Hart Prairie is one of the best places to see these local breeders around Flagstaff...and we did!

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

Icteridae (Yellow-breasted Chat).

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT (*Icteria virens*) – Chats have been tossed around to different families throughout taxonomic history. Now they are in their own family Icteridae. We had outstanding views of one near Page Springs.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies).

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – We had some scope views of a few at Mormon Lake. There aren't many places in Arizona where you can see these birds in the breeding season.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*)

ORCHARD ORIOLE (*Icterus spurius*) – We saw the young male that was setting up a territory at the Cameron Trading Post. Best of luck to him in finding a mate out there!

HOODED ORIOLE (*Icterus cucullatus*) [*]

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE (*Icterus bullockii*) – We had fabulous views of this stunning bird at John and Lynn's house.

SCOTT'S ORIOLE (*Icterus parisorum*) – We got on a beautiful singing male in the juniper woodland south of Flagstaff.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

Parulidae (New World Warblers).

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – These breed at the high elevation forests of Arizona. We saw some at Hart Prairie.

LUCY'S WARBLER (*Oreothlypis luciae*) – A classic riparian obligate. We saw a few at Page Springs.

VIRGINIA'S WARBLER (*Oreothlypis virginiae*) – The Lucy's Warbler replacement at the higher elevations. We chased one around at Hart Prairie.

MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) – A very local breeder in Arizona. We saw some in the willow thickets at Hart Prairie.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Our best views were at Kachina Wetlands.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*)

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – We saw a few at Hart Prairie.

GRACE'S WARBLER (*Setophaga graciae*) – We called one in as we waited for the Three-toed Woodpecker. These little warblers breed in Ponderosa Pine forests. The type specimen came from Prescott, Arizona.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – We were remarkably close to a singing male at Grand Canyon National Park.

RED-FACED WARBLER (*Cardellina rubrifrons*) – This is one of my favorite birds in Arizona. We saw a male in an Aspen grove at the San Francisco Peaks.

PAINTED REDSTART (*Myioborus pictus*) – One sang above us on the same perch for about 5 minutes! It was amazing to see it through the scope.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies).

HEPATIC TANAGER (*Piranga flava*) – It was cool to see a female singing a full song in the juniper woodland south of Flagstaff.

SUMMER TANAGER (*Piranga rubra*) – We had great views of a bird near Page Springs.

WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)

BLUE GROSBEAK (*Passerina caerulea*) – We had stunning views of a male near Page Springs. What a bird!

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows).

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – There was one at the gas station near Grand Canyon National Park.

CLIFF CHIPMUNK (*Tamias dorsalis*) – The common chipmunk at Grand Canyon.

ROCK SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – These rather tame squirrels regularly get fed at the Grand Canyon.

GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) – We saw these in many places throughout the tour.

ARIZONA GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus arizonensis*) – This riparian specialist was seen well south of Flagstaff.

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*) – We saw several at the Grand Canyon and a few at Mormon Lake.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*) – The fastest mammal in North America. We saw some in the grasslands near Cameron.

Herps

PLATEAU LIZARD (*Sceloporus tristichus*) – Perhaps the most common lizard in Northern Arizona. We saw them almost every day of the tour.

GREATER EARLESS LIZARD (*Cophosaurus texanus*) – We had great views of this lizard of mid elevation rocky slopes as it ran along the path at Montezuma Well.

COMMON LESSER EARLESS LIZARD (*Holbrookia maculata*)

ORNATE TREE LIZARD (*Urosaurus ornatus*) – We saw a gravid female on a tree at Page Springs.

COMMON SIDE-BLOTCHED LIZARD (*Uta stansburiana*)

DESERT SPINY LIZARD (*Sceloporus magister*) – This was the lizard we stopped for on our way back from Navajo Bridge.

CLARK'S SPINY LIZARD (*Sceloporus clarkii*) – We saw a few of these at Page Springs. They are best told apart from Desert Spiny Lizard by the barring on the forearm.

DESERT GRASSLAND WHIPTAIL (*Aspidoscelis uniparens*) – The common whiptail at the lower elevations.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 138 bird taxa and 9 mammal taxa