

Trip Report — Northern Arizona's Canyons and Condor 2025

May 17-23, 2025 with John Coons



Grand Canyon is spectacular no matter how many times one has visited. This view from Lipan Point on the east end of the national park offers one of the longest vistas along the Colorado River gorge. Photo by John Coons.

We all enjoyed a wonderful week of birding in Northern Arizona with daily trips out of our base in Flagstaff. Mid-to-late May is a wonderful time to bird here. Most of the local breeding birds have arrived with some migrants still passing through. Temperatures are still cool in the morning (sometimes cold!) and the high deserts just south of Flagstaff are not yet experiencing the summer heat.

With everyone arriving into Flagstaff by early afternoon on our first day we got a start on our birding with a trip to nearby Picture Canyon. Here we found our first Northern Flicker, Steller's Jays, Pygmy Nuthatches, and Redwinged Blackbirds, as well as both Western and Cassin's kingbirds, Black and Say's phoebes, Spotted Towhees, and a gorgeous male Mountain Bluebird. We then drove to dinner where we went over the plans for the next days.



This adult male California Condor, V3, is an 8 year old bird hatched at the Oregon Zoo and has been flying over the canyons and mesas of Northern Arizona and southern Utah for 6 1/2 years. This was one of five condors we encountered. Photo by Phil Lessner.

We headed towards the base of the San Francisco Peaks the next morning with a stop along the way to see Western Meadowlark and Western Bluebirds. Stopping in the coniferous forest, we walked the road and found a nice male Williamson's Sapsucker, Plumbeous Vireo, and a locally uncommon Downy Woodpecker which may have been more exciting for me than anyone else. A surprise was first hearing, then seeing, a pair of Townsend's Solitaires, a species that can be rather common in the fall and

winter but is often difficult to find in the breeding season. Further up the road we walked a meadow with scattered Bebb's willows and shrubs and saw singing Green-tailed Towhees, Vesper Sparrows, a pair of Red-naped Sapsuckers, and had several nice views of Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. A few Dusky Flycatchers were singing from willow tops as a locally breeding Orange-crowned Warbler was a bit less confiding. It was great to come across a Porcupine curled up near the top of one of the willows. With wind beginning to pick up we headed back to the forest for some shelter and found another Williamson's Sapsucker, a little group of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creeper, and had a nice view of a singing Hermit Thrush. We headed to a picnic site where we saw Grace's Warbler but the wind and cool temperatures convinced us to head back to Flagstaff for a warmer lunch in a diner along Historic Route 66. Afterwards, we drove to the east side of the Peaks where we walked into a burn from a forest fire that occurred in 2022. It took a bit of searching but we found our quarry, an American Threetoed Woodpecker which favors these burns to feed on the beetles in the decaying trees. We saw the Three-toed fly to the back side of a burned pine where it seemed to disappear. Investigating we found a hole in the tree and after a squeak a male Three-toed poked his head out for a look-see. After a break at the motel we made a stop at a town lake where we saw our first waterbirds. The oddest sighting was a pair of Cackling Geese that had been hanging around all winter and decided not to leave this spring. An Osprey was perched on a nest and an adult Bald Eagle circled the lake. We had nice looks at four species of swallows over the water and Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Spotted Sandpiper, and Great Blue Heron joined the more numerous Mallards and Canada Geese. We headed over to the house for a baked salmon dinner on our deck that Lynn prepared, but the strong wind thwarted the outdoor plans so we got cozy at our dining table inside.



American Three-toed Woodpecker reaches the southern limit of its usual range around Flagstaff where the favored habitat is recent burns from forest fires. We saw this male fly to a burned pine and seemingly disappear. We saw a suspicious looking hole in the tree and a few minutes later it peered out. Photo by Phil Lessner.

The following morning, we were off after breakfast heading to Grand Canyon National Park. A halfway stop just before our rest stop found a confiding Rock Wren right next to the road. Arriving at Grand Canyon with our fingers crossed in hopes of seeing a condor, we made our way to the Rim at Mather Point for one of the world's most spectacular views. We soaked in the grandeur as we scanned for soaring birds but the strong wind kept bird activity to a minimum. We headed to Grand Canyon Village where we walked the Rim Trail checking cliff ledges, butte tops, and the sky for condors with no luck. A few White-throated Swifts and Common Ravens were about it. At our lunch spot a Grace's Warbler appeared as did more Pygmy Nuthatches and Western Bluebirds. After another vista stop or two we headed out of the east end of the park. We stopped along the old section of highway and found a singing male Scott's Oriole, Black-chinned Sparrow, Blue-gray Nuthatches, and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays. We heard a group pf

Pinyon Jays calling up the slope and spent a chunk of time trying to get a view of them. This is a species that has been in a huge decline for several years for not-completely known reasons. We encountered two groups but could not get close and had to settle for scope views of a couple along the ridge. We headed on east to the small town of Cameron and, of course, had to stop at the water treatment pond. Not the most picturesque stop we made today, but this proved to be a great locale with a group of Wilson's Phalaropes, American Avocets, White-faced Ibis, Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, a single Bank Swallow, and a group of Lark Sparrows. We stopped at the historic Cameron Trading Post for dinner before heading back to Flagstaff for the night.



Originally placed with the similar-sized wood-warblers, the Olive Warbler is now considered to be the sole member of its family. The coniferous forests near Flagstaff mark the northern limit of its breeding range. Phil Lessner captured this lovely image on our final afternoon of birding.

Tuesday found us heading the opposite direction where we reached the southern edge of the Colorado Plateau and dropped over 2000 feet in elevation over about 12 miles of highway and got into mesquite desert

habitat. A Lucy's Warbler showed pretty well at our rest stop and we continued to the home of some long-time friends whose property encompasses a great stretch of riparian habitat along Oak Creek. Here, amongst the large cottonwoods, sycamores, and pastures we found a Gila Woodpecker making frequent trips to a nest cavity in a sycamore tree, Summer and Western tanagers, singing Yellow-breasted Chats, Cedar Waxwings, Abert's Towhees, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Bushtits, Osprey, Bullock's Orioles, Blue Grosbeaks, and a male Vermilion Flycatcher. We stopped at the Page Springs Fish Hatchery a bit up the road and watched hummingbird feeders where, there were Anna's and Black-chinned visiting. Also here, we came upon an Arizona Game and Fish invertebrate biologist and his interns who showed us a leaf with about forty of the tiny and extremely local Page Springs Snails attached. That was pretty cool. We did a short walk here and improved our views of Brown-crested and Ash-throated flycatchers, Bell's Vireo, an adult Verdin feeding a young, more Lucy's Warblers, Song Sparrows, Phainopepla, and a soaring Common Black Hawk. We headed up to the town of Sedona with scenic views of the surrounding red rocks for lunch at a long established restaurant. With full stomachs we drove the scenic route through Oak Creek Canyon making a few stops. In the canyon we left the desert behind and got back in to the riparian habitat that now included pine and Douglas fir forests. A sharply marked Bridled Titmouse was at our first site along with Virginia's Warbler, Acorn Woodpeckers, a singing Western Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, nesting Great Blue Herons, and two great Painted Redstarts.



After our known site for Lewis's Woodpecker had come up empty this spring, it was a very happy surprise to see one fly over our van along a dirt road. We jumped out and got great views of this odd looking woodpecker that fly-caught its prey item while we were watching. This was one of ten species of woodpeckers we saw. Photo by Phil Lessner.

Determined to see California Condor, the next morning we headed off after breakfast for Marble Canyon well up the Colorado River from Grand Canyon National Park. We made a pit stop in Cameron and some of us enjoyed Lynn's egg and cheese breakfast burrito snack before we drove on north, passing through some quite barren landscapes on the Navajo Reservation. Arriving at Navajo Bridge, spanning Marble Canyon and high above the Colorado River, it didn't take long to see first one, then two, then...five California Condors! We spent some time watching these huge flyers as they perched on the cliff ledges and on the girders under the car bridge. We had nice views of them in flight as they sailed across the canyon. We met two of the condor researchers who were more than happy to pass on information about these birds. There was one adult and four black-headed immatures and the provenance of each one is below. We returned to Cameron for lunch at the Trading Post again. In the courtyard of the motel, we found a fruiting mulberry that was attracting Black-headed Grosbeaks, Western Tanagers, Cedar Waxwings, Bullock's Oriole and a

Lazuli Bunting. Closing in on Flagstaff that afternoon we took a side road to a spring and were very excited to see a Lewis's Woodpecker fly by in front of us. We got out and had magnificent views of two individuals. This was the tenth species of woodpecker we saw on the trip and there aren't many places in North America where you can see more. Further along we finally caught up to and had great looks at a Red-faced Warbler, a species that was quite late in arriving this year. Scope views of a singing Olive-sided Flycatcher was another bonus here. We got back to the motel with a chance to have a little break before meeting again for dinner.



Townsend's Solitaires are quite local and often difficult to find during the breeding season. We heard one calling in the mixed-conifer forest and soon had great views of a pair. This is a species that tends to sing more during the fall and winter when they are defending their patches of juniper berries. Photo by Phil Lessner.

On our final day of birding, we decided to head south again where there was the best shot at seeing more new birds. We dropped off the Mogollon Rim again. Getting in to pinyon pine / juniper habitat we had nice views of a singing Gray Vireo as well as a Rufous-crowned Sparrow that perched up for

us. We made a stop at Montezuma Well to see this unusual sinkhole where another Common Black Hawk was soaring over Beaver Creek. A still migrating MacGillivray's Warbler surprised us, hopping about in a mesquite bush. At the water in the sinkhole, we were amazed to see a Virginia Rail sitting on top of the knocked over reeds right in the open. We climbed back up the Mogollon Rim and took a side road and finally found a locally breeding Gray Flycatcher. We did a picnic lunch overlooking Stoneman Lake where there were a fair number of Eared Grebes in breeding plumage as well as Canada Geese, Mallards, Redhead, Ruddy Duck, and Ring-necked Ducks, and lots of American Coots. Fully back in the pines, we stopped near Mormon Lake and tracked down a calling Olive Warbler, which is no longer a warbler and is now the sole member of its family. Our final stop of the day was at Marshall Lake where a Golden Eagle soared in the distance and we heard both Sora and Virginia Rail calling from the reeds. We returned to our motel and met a bit later for our final dinner together.

Heading to the airport or the shuttle to Phoenix the next morning everyone had a chance to sleep a little later. It was a great week of birding and fun to be with all of you. We had a wonderful group of folks spotting birds both in trees and flying in the distance. Thanks to Lynn for putting together the wonderful dinner as well as our hot breakfast snacks and daily fruit salad, but mostly to all of you for coming and letting me share some of Northern Arizona.



Grace's Warblers are usually found in the higher parts of pines but this individual gave us great close views at near eye level. Photo by Phil Lessner.

California Condor individuals seen at Navajo Bridge on 21 May 2025

V3: Male, hatched 10 May 2017 at Oregon Zoo

96: Female, hatched 19 April 2023 at Peregrine Fund Center, Boise, Idaho

28: Male, hatched 14 May 2023 at Peregrine Fund Center, Boise, Idaho

*: Sex unknown, hatched 1 May 2024 in the Wild

O: Sex unknown, hatched 17 May 2024 in the Wild



Just east of Grand Canyon on the Navajo Reservation, the Little Colorado River has carved its own spectacular canyon that twists and turns before joining the Colorado River in Grand Canyon. The gorge is quite stunning as viewed from the highway leading to Cameron. Photo by Phil Lessner.

Mammals encountered during our trip included:

Desert Cottontail (Sylvilagus audubonii)

North American Porcupine (Erethizon dorsatum)

Cliff Chipmunk (Neotamias dorsalis)

Gray-collared Chipmunk (Neotamias cinereicollis)

Common Rock Squirrel (Otospermophilus variegatus)

Common Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel (Callospermophilus lateralis)

Gunnison Prairie Dog (Cynomys gunnisoni)

Arizona Gray Squirrel (Sciurus arizonensis)

Abert's Squirrel (Sciurus aberti)

Wapiti (Cervus canadensis)

White-tailed Deer (Odocoileus virginianus)

Mule Deer (Odocoileus hemionus)

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: https://ebird.org/tripreport/372716

John Coons





Field Guides Birding Tours—Northern Arizona's Canyons and Condor, 2025 (with John Coons)



17 - 23 May 2025 (7 days) Link-only



Arizona, United States

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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		Show all det	tails
2	Cackling Goose Branta hutchinsii	•	1 1
140	Canada Goose Branta canadensis	▶ [1 4
3	Cinnamon Teal Spatula cyanoptera	•	a 1
4	Gadwall Mareca strepera) 1	1 2
48	Mallard Anas platyrhynchos) 1	1 8
6	Green-winged Teal Anas crecca	•	1 1
3	Redhead Aythya americana) 1	1 2
10	Ring-necked Duck Aythya collaris) 1	1 3
1	Ruddy Duck Oxyura jamaicensis	•	1 1
1	Gambel's Quail Callipepla gambelii	•	a 1
2	Eurasian Collared-Dove Streptopelia decaocto *) 1	1 2
31	Mourning Dove Zenaida macroura) 1	1 7
2	White-throated Swift Aeronautes saxatalis	•	1 1
12	Black-chinned Hummingbird Archilochus alexandri)	1 3
3	Anna's Hummingbird Calypte anna) I	12
19	Broad-tailed Hummingbird Selasphorus platycercus) 1	1 7
2	Virginia Rail Rallus limicola) 1	1 2
1	Sora Porzana carolina	•	1 1
301	American Coot Fulica americana) 1	1 2
11	American Avocet Recurvirostra americana	•	1 1
1	Killdeer Charadrius vociferus	•	1 1

6	Wilson's Phalarope Phalaropus tricolor) []]
5	Spotted Sandpiper Actitis macularius	▶ 🗖 2
2	Pied-billed Grebe Podilymbus podiceps	▶ 🗖 2
50	Eared Grebe Podiceps nigricollis) 📶 1
5	White-faced lbis Plegadis chihi) 📶 1
13	Great Blue Heron Ardea herodias	▶ 🖪 6
4	California Condor Gymnogyps californianus) 📶 1
16	Turkey Vulture Cathartes aura	▶ 1 7
4	Osprey Pandion haliaetus	▶ 1 4
1	Golden Eagle Aquila chrysaetos	1
2	Cooper's Hawk Astur cooperii	▶ 🗖 2
3	Bald Eagle Haliaeetus leucocephalus	▶ 🚮 3
3	Common Black Hawk Buteogallus anthracinus	▶ 🚮 3
2	Red-tailed Hawk Buteo jamaicensis	▶ 🗖 2
2	Williamson's Sapsucker Sphyrapicus thyroideus	▶ 🗖 2
2	Red-naped Sapsucker Sphyrapicus nuchalis) 📶 1
2	Lewis's Woodpecker Melanerpes lewis) 📶 1
5	Acorn Woodpecker Melanerpes formicivorus	▶ 🚮 3
3	Gila Woodpecker Melanerpes uropygialis	▶ 🚮 3
1	American Three-toed Woodpecker Picoides dorsalis) 📶 1
2	Downy Woodpecker Dryobates pubescens	▶ 🗖 2
3	Ladder-backed Woodpecker Dryobates scalaris	▶ 🚮 3
9	Hairy Woodpecker Dryobates villosus	▶ 1 6
14	Northern Flicker Colaptes auratus	▶ 1 7

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1	Olive-sided Flycatcher Contopus cooperi	•		1 [
6	Western Wood-Pewee Contopus sordidulus	Þ		1 4
1	Gray Flycatcher Empidonax wrightii	•		ו ק
3	Dusky Flycatcher Empidonax oberholseri	•		ו ק
1	Western Flycatcher Empidonax difficilis	•		ו ה
8	Black Phoebe Sayornis nigricans	•	i	1 5
5	Say's Phoebe Sayornis saya	Þ		1 3
1	Vermilion Flycatcher Pyrocephalus rubinus	•		ו ק
3	Ash-throated Flycatcher Myiarchus cinerascens	Þ		1 3
3	Brown-crested Flycatcher Myiarchus tyrannulus	Þ		12
5	Cassin's Kingbird Tyrannus vociferans	Þ		12
6	Western Kingbird Tyrannus verticalis	Þ		1 5
4	Bell's Vireo Vireo bellii	Þ		12
4	Gray Vireo Vireo vicinior	Þ		12
5	Plumbeous Vireo Vireo plumbeus	Þ		1 4
4	Warbling Vireo Vireo gilvus	Þ	í	12
22	Pinyon Jay Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus	•		ו ה
15	Steller's Jay Cyanocitta stelleri	Þ		1 6
5	Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay Aphelocoma woodhouseii	Þ		1 4
1	American Crow Corvus brachyrhynchos	•		1 1
89	Common Raven Corvus corax	•		19
9	Mountain Chickadee Poecile gambeli	Þ		1 5
1	Bridled Titmouse Baeolophus wollweberi	•		1 1

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4	Verdin Auriparus flaviceps	•		2
1	Bank Swallow Riparia riparia	Þ		1
51	Violet-green Swallow Tachycineta thalassina	Þ		6
16	Northern Rough-winged Swallow Stelgidopteryx serripennis	Þ		3
27	Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica	Þ		1
6	Cliff Swallow Petrochelidon pyrrhonota	•		2
14	Bushtit Psaltriparus minimus	•		3
1	Ruby-crowned Kinglet Corthylio calendula	Þ		11
8	White-breasted Nuthatch Sitta carolinensis	Þ	1	5
21	Pygmy Nuthatch Sitta pygmaea	Þ		7
4	Red-breasted Nuthatch Sitta canadensis	Þ		1
3	Brown Creeper Certhia americana	Þ		2
3	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher Polioptila caerulea	Þ		2
3	Rock Wren Salpinctes obsoletus	Þ		2
1	Canyon Wren Catherpes mexicanus	Þ		1
2	Northern House Wren Troglodytes aedon	Þ		2
2	Bewick's Wren Thryomanes bewickii	Þ		2
4	Northern Mockingbird Mimus polyglottos	Þ		4
7	Western Bluebird Sialia mexicana	Þ		4
1	Mountain Bluebird Sialia currucoides	Þ		1
2	Townsend's Solitaire Myadestes townsendi	Þ		1
2	Hermit Thrush Catharus guttatus	Þ	1	2
27	American Robin Turdus migratorius	•		6

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10	Cedar Waxwing Bombycilla cedrorum	▶ 🚺 2
4	Phainopepla Phainopepla nitens	▶ 🗖 3
3	Olive Warbler Peucedramus taeniatus	▶ 🗖 2
42	House Sparrow Passer domesticus *	▶ 🚺 5
11	House Finch Haemorhous mexicanus	▶ 1 5
2	Red Crossbill Loxia curvirostra) 🗐 1
2	Pine Siskin Spinus pinus	▶ 1 2
15	Lesser Goldfinch Spinus psaltria	▶ 1 3
1	Chipping Sparrow Spizella passerina) 🗐 1
4	Black-chinned Sparrow Spizella atrogularis) 📶 1
2	Brewer's Sparrow Spizella breweri	• 1
6	Black-throated Sparrow Amphispiza bilineata	▶ 1 2
11	Lark Sparrow Chondestes grammacus	▶ ■ 3
19	Dark-eyed Junco Junco hyemalis	▶ 🚺 10
2	White-crowned Sparrow Zonotrichia leucophrys	1
2	Vesper Sparrow Pooecetes gramineus) 🗐 1
10	Song Sparrow Melospiza melodia	▶ 🗖 2
6	Abert's Towhee Melozone aberti	▶ 🗖 2
1	Rufous-crowned Sparrow Aimophila ruficeps) 🗐 1
5	Green-tailed Towhee Pipilo chlorurus) 📶 1
16	Spotted Towhee Pipilo maculatus	▶ 🚺 10
4	Yellow-breasted Chat Icteria virens	▶ 1 2
1	Yellow-headed Blackbird Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus) 📶 1

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2	Western Meadowlark Sturnella neglecta	1
8	Bullock's Oriole Icterus bullockii	▶ 1 6
3	Scott's Oriole Icterus parisorum	▶ 🚺 2
44	Red-winged Blackbird Agelaius phoeniceus	▶ 🗖 4
6	Brown-headed Cowbird Molothrus ater	▶ 🚮 5
49	Brewer's Blackbird Euphagus cyanocephalus	▶ 🖪 8
8	Great-tailed Grackle Quiscalus mexicanus	▶ 🗖 2
2	Orange-crowned Warbler Leiothlypis celata	→ ii l 1
14	Lucy's Warbler Leiothlypis luciae	▶ 🚮 5
2	Virginia's Warbler Leiothlypis virginiae	1 2
1	MacGillivray's Warbler Geothlypis tolmiei) 📶 1
1	Common Yellowthroat Geothlypis trichas) 🗐 1
12	Yellow Warbler Setophaga petechia	▶ 🗖 5
16	Yellow-rumped Warbler Setophaga coronata	▶ 1 6
4	Grace's Warbler Setophaga graciae	▶ 🖪 3
3	Black-throated Gray Warbler Setophaga nigrescens	1 3
1	Red-faced Warbler Cardellina rubrifrons	→ 1 1
2	Painted Redstart Myioborus pictus	→ 1 1
3	Summer Tanager Piranga rubra) 1
30	Western Tanager Piranga Iudoviciana	▶ 🖪 8
1	Northern Cardinal Cardinalis cardinalis) 🚮 1
10	Black-headed Grosbeak Pheucticus melanocephalus	▶ 1 7
2	Blue Grosbeak Passerina caerulea	→ 1 1

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1 Lazuli Bunting Passerina amoena

▶ 🚮 1