



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Arizona Winter Specialties 2016**

Dec 29, 2016 to Jan 4, 2017

Chris Benesh

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



*A chilly morning out in the scenic San Rafael Grasslands. (Photo by participant Nancy Houlihan)*

Winter days in southeast Arizona are often sunny and warm, but that is not always the case. While we saw some sunny weather along the way, we did face some unusually cold and unsettled conditions. We started off the tour in Phoenix, where we visited Granada Park in order to track down some Rosy-faced Lovebirds. We had good luck with those, along with some nice looks at a mix of ducks. The following morning, we headed west to the Buckeye area in search of thrashers and sage sparrows. We had good success with both, in fact, it was the first five-thrasher day that I've experienced at that site. From there we headed over to Glendale, where there was a huge mix of waterfowl and shorebirds, including a continuing Long-tailed Duck. Then we headed south towards Tucson, spending the day in the expansive Santa Cruz Flats. This area has become a premier winter destination for birders. We spent a fair bit of time at a stakeout spot hoping to see a pair of Rufous-backed Robins. While they were no-shows, we did see a nice Ruddy Ground-Dove there. Elsewhere we had nice looks at some Mountain Plovers and a secretive Sprague's Pipit, as well as some longspurs and Ferruginous Hawks. Fortunately, the weather held off long enough for us to enjoy the day.

Considering the weather, we opted to head slightly farther afield with a road trip to Willcox and Portal. The stop at Willcox was productive, providing good scope views of a male Eurasian Wigeon. In Portal, we had nice looks at the stakeout Streak-backed Oriole, and some other goodies with the help of local guide Dodie. The feeders at Bob Rodriguez's and at the Cave Creek Ranch were particularly productive. The next day began incredibly cold, and our visit to the San Rafael Grasslands were most notable for the frost covering everything. Things warmed up as we headed to Patagonia Lake and its Green Kingfisher and Black-capped Gnatcatchers. We spent the rest of the afternoon hitting a few other spots along the Santa Cruz River. Our final day began with a brief visit to Reid Park for some ducks before heading down to Green Valley and Madera Canyon where we had an enjoyable time seeing a nice mix of birds. We had one last adventure in mind, making a run out to Whitewater Draw in time to take in the huge concentrations of Sandhill Cranes that spent the night there.

I had a great time taking you around southeast Arizona, and I want to thank all of you for coming. I hope to see you again on future trips and wish you the best in birding.

--Chris

**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

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## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons*) – We had a single bird fly past us at Whitewater Draw on our last afternoon.

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Chen caerulescens*) – We had five of these in the Arlington Valley.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*)

**GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*)

**EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Anas penelope*) – Good scope looks at a male within a huge flock of American Wigeon at Willcox.

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*) – A nice "Storm" Wigeon was seen on our first afternoon.

**MALLARD (NORTHERN)** (*Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*)

**MALLARD (MEXICAN)** (*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*) – Some of these were seen at Willcox and Whitewater Draw along with regular Mallards.

Whether or not Mexican Duck is a distinct species or not as been a subject of debate and recent evidence suggests that Mallard is not its closest relative.

**CINNAMON TEAL** (*Anas cyanoptera*) – A couple of these were seen in the big duck flock at Whitewater Draw.

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*)

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*)

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN)** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)

**CANVASBACK** (*Aythya valisineria*)

**REDHEAD** (*Aythya americana*)

**RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*)

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*)

**LONG-TAILED DUCK** (*Clangula hyemalis*) – Seen at the Glendale Recharge Ponds. Quite a stealthy bird, it took quite a bit of scanning before the bird stayed at the surface for extended periods. A male in formative plumage (first winter), part of a mini-invasion of this species in some interior west states.

**BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*)

**COMMON GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala clangula*) – A female was also present in Glendale.

**COMMON MERGANSER** (*Mergus merganser*) – Quite a few of these around this winter. Seen at four locations with as many as 25 present in Glendale.

**RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

### Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

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

### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

**EARED GREBE** (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – About eight of these were at the Glendale Recharge Ponds.

### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**NEOTROPIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

### Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*)

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*)

### Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*) – Seen near Nogales.

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*)

### Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*)

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*)

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*)

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Nice views of a near adult bird at the Glendale Recharge Ponds.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

**RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S)** (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) – We had a Harlan's just north of Whitewater Draw in the Sulphur Springs Valley.

**FERRUGINOUS HAWK** (*Buteo regalis*) – It was a great trip for this species with about a dozen seen in total, including a few dark morph birds.

### Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

**VIRGINIA RAIL** (*Rallus limicola*) [\*]

**SORA** (*Porzana carolina*) [\*]

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*)

### Gruidae (Cranes)

**SANDHILL CRANE** (*Antigone canadensis*) – An impressive sight at Whitewater Draw where roughly 10000 were assembled.

### Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

**AMERICAN AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra americana*) – A few in Glendale and a few at Willcox.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

**MOUNTAIN PLOVER** (*Charadrius montanus*) – We counted at least 53 of these in the Santa Cruz Flats at the Evergreen Turf Farm.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**LONG-BILLED CURLEW** (*Numenius americanus*) – We estimated about 90 birds in a big flock west of Phoenix.

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*)

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*)

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

**HERRING GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – A first cycle bird was hanging out at the Glendale Recharge Ponds during our visit there.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) [I]

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

**INCA DOVE** (*Columbina inca*) – Several were at Granada Park in Phoenix.

**RUDDY GROUND-DOVE** (*Columbina talpacoti*) – A handsome male hanging out with some Inca Doves in the Santa Cruz Flats.

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*) – One was perched on a power pole near Granada Park. A few were present in Portal, Sonoita, and along the Santa Cruz River.

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

**GREATER ROADRUNNER** (*Geococcyx californianus*)

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

**BARN OWL** (*Tyto alba*) – A couple of folks saw one flush out of an orchard grove in the Santa Cruz Flats.

Strigidae (Owls)

**GREAT HORNED OWL** (*Bubo virginianus*) – Nancy spotted a couple of these splendid birds along the Santa Cruz River near Tubac.

**BURROWING OWL** (*Athene cunicularia*) – Virginia helped us zero in on a bird near the Evergreen Turf Farm.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

**MAGNIFICENT HUMMINGBIRD** (*Eugenes fulgens*) – An immature male and a female were hanging out at the Santa Rita Lodge.

**BLUE-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Lampornis clemenciae*) – Several seen in Portal with our best looks at the Cave Creek Ranch.

**ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD** (*Calypte anna*) – Nice views of a male on our first afternoon in Phoenix. Others seen almost daily.

**COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD** (*Calypte costae*) – We had one male being dived bombed by a male Anna's at Robbins Butte.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

**GREEN KINGFISHER** (*Chloroceryle americana*) – A wonderful sighting for Arizona, we had nice looks at the male wintering at Patagonia Lake.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

**ACORN WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)

**GILA WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes uropygialis*)

**RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – We had a couple of birds along Santa Gertrudis Lane.

**LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides scalaris*)

**ARIZONA WOODPECKER** (*Picoides arizonae*) – We tracked down a couple of birds in Portal and enjoyed the male visiting the feeder at the Santa Rita Lodge feeders.

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

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**CRESTED CARACARA** (*Caracara cheriway*) – We did track down four of these in the Santa Cruz Flats where this species has become regular.

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*)

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – We did have a handsome male prairie bird at the golf course in Willcox.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*)

**PRAIRIE FALCON** (*Falco mexicanus*)

Psittaculidae (Old World Parrots)

**ROSY-FACED LOVEBIRD** (*Agapornis roseicollis*) – A bunch of these were present at Granada Park in Phoenix. [I]

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

**GRAY FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax wrightii*) – We had a couple of nice encounters at Patagonia Lake.

**DUSKY FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax oberholseri*)

**BLACK PHOEBE** (*Sayornis nigricans*)

**EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*) – One was present at Patagonia Lake. This species is a rare winter visitor to Arizona.

**SAY'S PHOEBE** (*Sayornis saya*)

**VERMILION FLYCATCHER** (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – Seen almost daily, this species has increased in numbers in recent years.

**ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) – Heard by most of us and seen by a couple of folks in the Santa Cruz Flats.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

**LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE** (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

**HUTTON'S VIREO** (*Vireo huttoni*)

**PLUMBEOUS VIREO** (*Vireo plumbeus*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**MEXICAN JAY** (*Aphelocoma wollweberi*)

**CHIHUAHUA RAVEN** (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*)

Alaudidae (Larks)

**HORNED LARK** (*Eremophila alpestris*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Quite a few of these were present in Glendale.

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – A few of these were flying around with Rough-winged Swallows at Camelback Lake.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

**BRIDLED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus wollweberi*)

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

**VERDIN** (*Auriparus flaviceps*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (INTERIOR WEST)** (*Sitta carolinensis nelsoni*)

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

**BROWN CREEPER** (*Certhia americana*) [\*]

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

**HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*)

**MARSH WREN** (*Cistothorus palustris*)

**BEWICK'S WREN** (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

**CACTUS WREN** (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*) – This was an eleventh hour find near Green Valley.

Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)

**BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila melanura*)

**BLACK-CAPPED GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila nigriceps*) – It took a bit of searching, but we were eventually able to track down this species at Patagonia Lake.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

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

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**WESTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia mexicana*) – Some nice looks at this species particularly in Harshaw Canyon.

**MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia currucoides*) – We came across a nice flock of these in the Santa Cruz Flats.

**TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE** (*Myadestes townsendi*) – We heard a bird giving some crazy vocalizations in Portal, likely some agitated calls of a bird coveting a nearby fruiting tree. Another flyover at Madera Canyon.

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*)

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

**CURVE-BILLED THRASHER** (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)

**BENDIRE'S THRASHER** (*Toxostoma bendirei*) – Some really terrific views of this species in the thrasher spot west of Phoenix.

**LE CONTE'S THRASHER** (*Toxostoma lecontei*) – It took a bit of searching, but we eventually tracked down a pair of these near Buckeye. And then once we were almost back to the van, we scoped another one sitting up!

**CRISSAL THRASHER** (*Toxostoma crissale*) – Really terrific looks at a pair of birds near Buckeye soon after we started our thrasher search.

**SAGE THRASHER** (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – We seen at Robbins Butte while we were searching for Bell's Sparrows.

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

**AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*)

**SPRAGUE'S PIPIT** (*Anthus spragueii*) – It took quite a bit of looking around, but Jane spotted one slinking through the grass that eventually showed well for all.

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

**CEDAR WAXWING** (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – A fair number were around Portal.

Ptilionotidae (Silky-flycatchers)



**PHAINOPEPLA** (*Phainopepla nitens*) – Nancy spotted our first.

*Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)*

**MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR** (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – Thanks to a tip from my friend Victoria, we had a nice scope look at a couple of birds in the Santa Cruz Flats.

*Parulidae (New World Warblers)*

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*)

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*)

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S)** (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – It's looking increasingly likely that the Yellow-rumped Warbler complex will be split again in 2017. Most of the birds seen were the Audubon's Warbler, though there was a single Myrtle foraging at Whitewater Draw.

**BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER** (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – We had one at Patagonia Lake State Park.

**PAINTED REDSTART** (*Myioborus pictus*) – A flashy bird showed for us at the Santa Rita Lodge feeders on our last day.

*Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)*

**RUFIOUS-WINGED SPARROW** (*Peucaea carpalis*) – Some of us saw the continuing bird in Portal, and then we had some nice looks on South River Road and again below Madera Canyon.

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*)

**BREWER'S SPARROW** (*Spizella breweri*) – A few of these were at Whitewater Draw.

**BLACK-THROATED SPARROW** (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – A marvelous sparrow well seen on a few occasions beginning in Portal.

**LARK SPARROW** (*Chondestes grammacus*) – We had a single individual in the Santa Cruz Flats.

**LARK BUNTING** (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) – A flock of about 25 seen just north of Willcox.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO** (*Junco hyemalis*) – Juncos are also being examined this year for a potential shake-up with respect to species limits. We saw several subspecies including Oregon, Pink-sided, and Gray-headed.

**YELLOW-EYED JUNCO** (*Junco phaeonotus*) – We had one at the Cave Creek Ranch and a couple more at the Santa Rita Lodge.

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*)

**SAGEBRUSH SPARROW** (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*) – We had some good scope views at the thrasher spot west of Phoenix.

**BELL'S SPARROW (CANESCENS)** (*Artemisiospiza belli canescens*) – We did track down a single individual of this former Sage sparrow at Robbins Butte.

**VESPER SPARROW** (*Pooecetes gramineus*)

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

**SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*)

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolni*)

**SWAMP SPARROW** (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Nancy and Larry spotted one of these at Patagonia Lake.

**CANYON TOWHEE** (*Melospiza fusca*)

**ABERT'S TOWHEE** (*Melospiza aberti*)

**RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Aimophila ruficeps*)

**GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo chlorurus*)

**SPOTTED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo maculatus*)

*Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)*

**HEPATIC TANAGER** (*Piranga flava*) – A gorgeous pair of birds hanging out at the Santa Rita Lodge in Madera Canyon.

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

**PYRRHULOXIA** (*Cardinalis sinuatus*) – The desert cardinal, well seen on several days.

**LAZULI BUNTING** (*Passerina amoena*) – We had a brief encounter with a handsome male at the Roadside Rest.

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

**WESTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella neglecta*)

**EASTERN MEADOWLARK (LILIAN'S)** (*Sturnella magna lilianae*) – Most of meadowlarks seen on the trip were wintering Westerns, but in some of the natural grasslands we did have a few of these Easterns.

**YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – A few big flocks encountered along the way. It was impressive to hear the giant flock that flew over us in the Santa Cruz Flats.

**BREWER'S BLACKBIRD** (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

**GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*)

**STREAK-BACKED ORIOLE (WEST MEXICAN)** (*Icterus pustulatus microstictus*) – Our side trip to Portal paid off with a nice sighting of this rare visitor from Mexico. Thanks to Dan for re-spotting it for us.

*Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)*

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

**PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*) – A few in Portal and in Madera Canyon.

**LESSER GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus psaltria*)

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) [1]

## **MAMMALS**

**DESERT COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)

**BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT** (*Lepus californicus*)

**ROCK SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus variegatus*)

**ARIZONA GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus arizonensis*)

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

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## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

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**Totals for the tour: 163 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa**