



Field Guides Tour Report

Northern Arizona's Canyons and Condor II 2015

Jun 5, 2015 to Jun 10, 2015

John Coons

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California Condors have been flying about the Grand Canyon again since 1996. This individual, one of the oldest, has been soaring over the chasm for 18 years. Photo by guide John Coons.

We enjoyed five wonderful days of birding in Northern Arizona, seeing some fantastic scenery and the specialty birds of the area. The exquisite Grand Canyon, impressive Little Colorado River Gorge, San Francisco Peaks and Red Rock Country of Sedona were the perfect backdrops for seeing all these birds.

We will never forget the California Condor in the Grand Canyon, first circling below us, then disappearing onto a ledge beneath our vantage, and then, suddenly, another one soaring towards us at eye level and landing on a rocky promontory about 100 feet away. We had many other highlights on the trip, including the perched Golden Eagle at Mormon Lake, the Common Black-Hawk nest with its small chick, two Zone-tailed Hawks at the Grand Canyon, the fabulous Lewis's Woodpeckers at their nest hole, the surprise of stumbling on to a male American Three-toed Woodpecker feeding young at a nest, the two Peregrines rocketing past the overlook, the Olive-sided Flycatcher perched for ten minutes, Gray Vireos showing nicely, Pinyon Jays at our outdoor dinner, the Canyon Wren perched on the rock cliff edge nearly oblivious to us, a close male Olive Warbler, scope views of a singing Virginia's Warbler, great looks at several Red-faced Warblers, and a couple of gorgeous Scott's Orioles, among many others. In the mammal department, we had a pair of Gray Foxes patrolling the rim of Montezuma Well and a fair number of Elk and Pronghorn -- plus, we enjoyed hearing Coyotes calling at Mormon Lake during the day.

It was great to travel with all of you in my "backyard". I hope we get the chance to do it again in the near future! --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 a good number at the pond near the motel. These are a quite recent and numerous summering bird here after a few decided to stay after enjoying the Flagstaff winter. Some had goslings which means they aren't going anywhere soon.

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – We had nice views of a drake in Oak Creek and another sitting on some equipment at Montezuma Well.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – We had one at the Kachina Wetlands.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – Mostly a western species, we had several good views of this quite pretty duck.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas crecca*) – A handful of males and females were seen at the Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – Several were at the Kachina Wetlands where we saw males with bright blue bills.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

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

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – A few were seen at the Kachina Wetlands where some of the young still had the stripes on their head.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – This has recently become the more common cormorant in the Flagstaff area as they have just invaded the northern part of Arizona.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – It was a bit of a surprise to see this uncommon local migrant at the pond across the road from the motel one morning.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – We saw one flying bird along Oak Creek.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – These were a daily occurrence.

CALIFORNIA CONDOR (*Gymnogyps californianus*) – We had a fabulous experience with several individuals at the Grand Canyon. After scanning near and far for awhile we looked down to see an adult California Condor gliding by about 300 feet below us. It flew onto a cliff ledge under us where we could not see it from any angle. Then we saw another flying condor which circled and landed about 100 feet away on top of an exposed rock. Wow! Quite a crowd developed as we watched it for some time. Then we saw two other birds soaring overhead. We only managed to read the wing tag of our close bird, #23 a male, which we learned has been flying at the Grand Canyon for 18 years. And, Joyce even managed a selfie with the bird. We figured we saw at least four and perhaps six different individuals. Yip! Yip! Yip!

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We ended up seeing birds at three different nests including one within sight of our motel.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – We spotted an individual perched in a juniper along the bluff at Mormon Lake which was a bit of a surprise. Some time later we saw it perched in another tree further up the road where it was being mobbed by a Northern Mockingbird.

COMMON BLACK HAWK (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) – We had great looks at two birds tending to a three week old chick in a nest along Oak Creek. We later saw the two adults soaring quite high as we watched from John and Becky's veranda.

ZONE-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo albonotatus*) – We were fortunate to see individuals at two different locations at the Grand Canyon. One soared below us while the other came up over the canyon rim then went into a steep dive. These are quite uncommon in the area.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – We saw a fair number during the week.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – After hearing a good number we saw one walk out of the marsh vegetation at the Kachina Wetlands.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) [✱]

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – One was seen teetering about at the Kachina Wetlands.

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 had pretty good views of birds darting about above and below us at the Grand Canyon and again at Montezuma Well.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

MAGNIFICENT HUMMINGBIRD (*Eugenes fulgens*) – We saw a female make a couple of feeding forays to the feeders in Oak Creek Canyon but only had a brief look at a male that got chased off quickly. This is about as far north as this species occurs in North America.

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*) – Good numbers of males and females were seen.

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna*) – A couple of nicely colored males came in to John and Becky's feeders along Oak Creek.

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – The common mountain hummingbird in the area, we saw several at Hart Prairie.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – We heard one calling near John and Becky's place along Oak Creek. There are only a handful of nesting records for this species in the last 80 years and this was a likely candidate.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – We had great views of this unusual woodpecker at a nest hole right in Flagstaff. The combination of colors on this bird make it unique.

ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – We saw a couple in Oak Creek Canyon.

GILA WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes uropygialis*) – We saw a quite active bird at John and Becky's house on Oak Creek then saw it again at Montezuma Well.

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – We searched for these colorful woodpeckers for quite awhile before getting a nice look at a male. A quite differently colored female made a brief appearance.

RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – A male finally decided to show himself in Hart Prairie.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – I believe Allan saw one at the Williamson's Sapsucker spot.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Though we only encountered a couple of these it is a quite widespread bird in the forests of Northern Arizona.

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides dorsalis*) – We had great looks at a male after a bit of searching at the edge of a burn in upper Oak Creek Canyon. Not hearing any drumming from the birds we heard soft calls coming from a hole in a burned stump. We backed off and saw a male with a yellow crown make two feeding visits. This is a quite uncommon bird in Arizona.

NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus cafer*) – These were all of the western "Red-shafted" form.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – We watched two individuals flying about at the overlook at Mormon Lake. It was a great show.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus cooperi*) – We watched a bird sitting for about ten minutes after tracking down its distinctive call. The scope view showed all the field marks quite well.

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*)

GRAY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax wrightii*) – It took some chasing but we finally got a good view of this quite local breeder.

DUSKY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax oberholseri*) – We saw a few of these quite local birds in Hart Prairie at the site where they were first described as a species in 1939. Then we heard one singing at the bottom of the cliff at Mormon Lake which seemed an unusual location.

CORDILLERAN FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax occidentalis*)

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*) – We saw a few along Oak Creek.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – One of our first birds on our first afternoon, we saw one that was certainly nesting under an eave of one of the buildings at Kachina Wetlands.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – We saw a male and a female in the horse pasture near John and Becky's place along Oak Creek.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus cinerascens*)

BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – Great views of a quite cooperative individual along Oak Creek.

CASSIN'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus vociferans*)

WESTERN KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – Our best view was at the Cameron Trading Post.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

BELL'S VIREO (*Vireo bellii*) – Often a difficult to see skulker we saw one sitting right out in the open.

GRAY VIREO (*Vireo vicinior*) – One of the specialties of the area we had nice looks at this habitat specific bird in the pinyon-juniper habitat near Grand Canyon.

PLUMBEOUS VIREO (*Vireo plumbeus*)

WARBLING VIREO (*Vireo gilvus*) – A fairly common voice of the aspen forests of Northern Arizona.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – We had nice views of a young bird in a tree top then even better ones when a couple came in to the water feature at dinner. This is another of the area specialties.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – We saw a few of these noisy birds.

WESTERN SCRUB-JAY (*Aphelocoma californica*) – Good views at the Grand Canyon and again south of Flagstaff.

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – We saw about four individuals in Hart Prairie just below the mountain peak where these birds breed.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Quite common near Flagstaff. Their numbers thin out the further from the city that one goes.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Quite common throughout.

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – We saw one flying about then land on a rock, certainly near a nest, near Mormon Lake.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

PURPLE MARTIN (*Progne subis*) – It was great to discover a new site for these very local and uncommon breeders in the Flagstaff area. We saw one fly past then jumped out of the van and ended up seeing about six birds.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – A rather uncommon species here, we saw a couple at the Kachina Wetlands.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – By far the most numerous swallow we encountered. We saw many at the Grand Canyon where we were looking down on them.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*) – A fairly common bird of the coniferous forests we saw a few here and there.

BRIDLED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) – We had nice looks along Oak Creek at John and Becky's house.

JUNIPER TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – Our first was at the Grand Canyon then we saw them again in the same habitat south of Flagstaff.

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*) – Great looks at this true desert dweller at Montezuma Well.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (*Psaltriparus minimus*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*)

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*) – This tiny nuthatches entertained us several times including at the water feature at dinner.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*) – A fair number were singing and we had a good view.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – One popped up on the wall at the Grand Canyon and was only three feet away from us. What a look.

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – We watched one sitting still for several minutes on the rim of Lake Montezuma. What a great song!

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

CACTUS WREN (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*) – We were as far north as these birds get in central Arizona when we had one in the scope near Lake Montezuma.

Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

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

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*) – We saw these just about every day of the trip.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – We had good views of a couple of these sky blue gorgeous birds.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) [*]

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

CRISSAL THRASHER (*Toxostoma crissale*) – We couldn't get a view of a bird calling up the slope. [*]

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – This is not a common bird at the higher elevations around Flagstaff so it was a bit of a surprise to see one mobbing the Golden Eagle we found at Mormon Lake.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Ptilionotidae (Silky-flycatchers)

PHAINOPEPLA (*Phainopepla nitens*) – This quite unusual species showed well in the Oak Creek area where these birds come to visit after breeding further south.

Peucedramidae (Olive Warbler)

OLIVE WARBLER (*Peucedramus taeniatus*) – We had wonderful views of a nicely plumaged male with a quite orange head. This species has long been a taxonomic enigma and has recently been placed in its own family.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – Another local breeder in Arizona, we saw a couple and heard a few more in Hart Prairie on our first morning.

LUCY'S WARBLER (*Oreothlypis luciae*)

VIRGINIA'S WARBLER (*Oreothlypis virginiae*) – We had good views of a singing bird in Hart Prairie. It even sat still long enough to get the scope on it.

MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) – Often a real skulker and a tough one to see well we had great views of this local breeder in Hart Prairie.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*)

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – This is a rather common breeder in the mixed conifer and pine forests of the area.

GRACE'S WARBLER (*Setophaga graciae*) – Another denizen of the pine and coniferous forests, we had a few nice looks.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – We saw our first at the Grand Canyon well enough to see the small yellow loreal spot.

RED-FACED WARBLER (*Cardellina rubrifrons*) – Often thought of as a southeast Arizona specialty we had several nice looks at this beauty, where they are often more readily seen than in the Sky Islands of the south.

PAINTED REDSTART (*Myioborus pictus*) – One individual was working through the branches of the large cypress tree right above us at John and Becky's cabin.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT (*Icteria virens*) – We had good looks at this skulker along Oak Creek south of Sedona.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – This unusually colored species showed well in Hart Prairie where it is a rather common breeder.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

RUFOUS-CROWNED SPARROW (*Aimophila ruficeps*) – It was a bit of a surprise to hear this bird singing up a slope near Montezuma Well. We finally got the scope on it for a good view.

ABERT'S TOWHEE (*Melospiza aberti*) – Rather common in central Arizona along the creeks we saw a couple well along Oak Creek at John and Becky's house.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW (*Spizella atrogularis*) – This subtly beautiful bird was singing its heart out from the top of a juniper along the Gray Mountain road.

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*)

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – Quite a handsome sparrow we saw these in the Montezuma Well area.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)

DARK-EYED JUNCO (RED-BACKED) (*Junco hyemalis dorsalis*)

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

HEPATIC TANAGER (*Piranga flava*) – We saw a calling female along the slopes of Gray Mountain where this bird would be slightly out of range.

SUMMER TANAGER (*Piranga rubra*) – Both bright red males and females were seen.

WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – We saw a surprisingly few number of these birds. They must have been nesting and quite inconspicuous.

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – The southwest race of this bird is a desert species and that's just where we saw it.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – We had a great scope view of the one that was singing from the top of a juniper at Mormon Lake.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – We saw several at the Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon before it started to rain.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

HOODED ORIOLE (*Icterus cucullatus*) – Nice views of a couple of these at both of John and Becky's places.

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE (*Icterus bullockii*)

SCOTT'S ORIOLE (*Icterus parisorum*) – We had a few nice looks at this very handsome oriole along the slopes of Gray Mountain.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – This was a big siskin winter and spring in the area and many were still hanging around.

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [H]

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – These were the cottontails we saw at the higher elevations.

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*)

CLIFF CHIPMUNK (*Tamias dorsalis*) – Several were about the walls and ledges at the Grand Canyon.

ROCK SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – We saw a handful but they were most prevalent at the Grand Canyon where someone may have once fed one.

GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys gunnisoni*)

ABERT'S SQUIRREL (*Sciurus aberti*) – These were the quite handsome squirrels that we saw in the pine forests with the long tufted ears, reddish back and silvery gray tail.

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*) – We saw one swimming in Montezuma Well.

GRAY FOX (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) – Two of these quite shy predators were walking along the top of Montezuma Well.

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*) – We heard one or two yipping from below the cliff at Mormon Lake. [*]

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*) – There were a good number in the basin at Mormon Lake after we saw three bulls with velvet antlers along the highway.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*) – We saw about six of these handsome open country mammals on the day we went to the Grand Canyon.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 139 bird taxa and 14 mammal taxa