



Field Guides Tour Report

NORTHERN ARIZONA'S CANYONS AND CONDOR I 2017

Jun 3, 2017 to Jun 8, 2017

John Coons

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



*Perhaps the most sublime spectacle on earth, the vastness of the Grand Canyon is hard to capture in a photo. No wonder it is hard to find a California Condor here.
Photo by participant Larry Meade.*

It was so great to bird with all of you during our time in Northern Arizona. With some of the best scenery in the world and great birds it is hard to go wrong. The Grand Canyon, the Red Rocks of the Sedona area, Montezuma Well, Oak Creek Canyon, and the drive through Navajo Country covered a lot of beautiful habitats. We had gorgeous weather throughout with cool mornings and warm afternoons and just enough clouds to keep bird activity going.

The highlight of the trip had to be our experience with seven California Condors perched under Navajo Bridge while an adult and chick were in a nearby crevice on the cliff face, but our rarest bird was the Common Crane that reappeared at Mormon Lake after an absence of 2 1/2 weeks. It is a mega-rarity for all of North America and the first record for Arizona. We had many other highlights that included a Common Black-Hawk perched at a nest, Virginia Rails and Soras walking about on our first afternoon, watching the Burrowing Owls when the Pronghorn approached, a pair of Lewis's Woodpeckers at a nest hole, a brilliant male Williamson's Sapsucker, great looks at an American Three-toed Woodpecker, Gray, Dusky and Cordilleran flycatchers all in the scope and calling, good views of Gray Vireo, Pinyon Jays interrupting our dinner on the porch, a male Mountain Bluebird on a post just off the road, an uncommon Gray Catbird, a quite out-of-range Northern Parula (a new yard bird for me!), a scope view of a singing Red-faced Warbler, Painted Redstart, a close singing Black-chinned Sparrow, many Green-tailed Towhees, and our finale Lazuli Bunting among others.

A list of other herps and insects that we spotted is at the end of the list, most of those thanks to Larry. It was a joy to share my native habitat with all of you and I hope we can get together again for another adventure. 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 lot of these in several locations.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – A couple of pairs were at the Kachina Wetlands and again at Mormon Lake.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – These beautiful ducks were seen well at the Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – A single male was seen at Mormon Lake when we were scanning for the crane.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas crecca*) – We saw a few at the Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon.

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – A rather uncommon bird at this time of year, we saw one on our first afternoon in Flagstaff, then a few more south of town.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – There were a good number at the Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – We spotted a pair.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Several were seen around Mormon Lake while we were scanning for the Common Crane.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – We saw a single individual on the two days we went to Mormon Lake.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Lots of these.

CALIFORNIA CONDOR (*Gymnogyps californianus*) – After not seeing any sign of them at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon we headed north to Marble Canyon where we immediately found seven! individuals perched under the bridge which afforded us great views. We then walked out on the foot bridge over the gorge and scoped the active nest site where we could see the adult in the grotto with a chick that hatched on May 30th under its wing. This was well worth the extra drive.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We saw a couple or three in various places with our first right near the hotel in Flagstaff.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – We had nice looks at one on a nest at Montezuma Well, but the day before we spotted one on a fence post with a prey item in its talons.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Jeff spotted an adult that flew over as we were scoping the Common Crane at Mormon Lake.

COMMON BLACK HAWK (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) – We saw and heard a pair around John and Becky's house along Oak Creek then we had a nice view of one at a nest at the Page Springs fish hatchery.

ZONE-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo albonotatus*) – While scanning for condors at the Grand Canyon we had an adult pass right overhead but it was headed away by the time we saw it. This is a species that has become more common in northern Arizona in recent years.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – We had great views of a couple of birds at Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon. We heard about six more calling from the reeds.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – Also seen well at Kachina Wetlands where we saw one swim across a pond then heard a few more.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Gruidae (Cranes)

COMMON CRANE (*Grus grus*) – It was a real treat to see this mega-rarity at Mormon Lake. First seen in early May this bird stayed for about 10 days then disappeared. It was seen again a day before our visit. We had scope views from a good ways off and managed to walk a bit closer as it hung out near a few Great Blue Herons that seemed small next to it. This individual is the first record for Arizona. Yip! Yip! Yip!

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

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

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaidura macroura*)

Strigidae (Owls)

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – We got to a prairie dog colony with just a few minutes to spare before it got too dark to see and we spotted two or three birds flying about and perching on the ground. It was really great to hear them calling as we were leaving.

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COMMON NIGHTHAWK (*Chordeiles minor*) – We saw one flying about over the large water trough near the Burrowing Owl site.

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – The Grand Canyon must be the coolest place there is to be a swift.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*) – A fair number were coming to the feeders at John and Becky's two places.

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna*) – We saw a male or two and a few females at John and Becky's feeders.

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – This was the common hummingbird of the mountains with several good views on our first morning in Hart Prairie.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – We had great views of a pair at a nest site in Flagstaff on our first morning. This is a quite unusual woodpecker in both its habits and coloration.

ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – This colorful woodpecker showed well a couple of times.

GILA WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes uropygialis*) – There was a pair at near a nest hole at John and Becky's house along Oak Creek.

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – A wonderful woodpecker of the mountain west we had a nice view of a male drumming on an aspen near Hart Prairie.

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*) – A desert species; we saw a pair near Page Springs.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – A rather uncommon species in the Flagstaff area; we had nice looks at one on the way to Hart Prairie.

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides dorsalis*) – This species is quite uncommon throughout Arizona but we had a nice view of a silent individual in upper Oak Creek Canyon where it was near a stand of burned trees.

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

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Christine and I heard one on the morning when we were headed to the Phoenix shuttle. [*]

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus cooperi*) – We had scope views of a singing bird perched atop a tall pine in the Hart Prairie area.

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*)

GRAY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax wrightii*) – It took quite a bit of looking but we ended up with nice views of this rather local species in the Flagstaff area.

DUSKY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax oberholseri*) – We saw several amongst the Bebb's willows at Hart Prairie which is the site where this species was first described to science.

CORDILLERAN FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax occidentalis*) – A calling individual perched for a scope view on our first morning near the base of the San Francisco Peaks.

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

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*)

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – A beautiful male was perching and flying about over the pasture near John and Becky's house along Oak Creek.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) – These were calling and seen well near Montezuma Well.

BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – A riparian species in northern Arizona, we had an aggressive pair at John and Becky's house along Oak Creek.

CASSIN'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus vociferans*) – Our best view was in Oak Creek Canyon at the rest stop.

WESTERN KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – A quite accommodating bird was at the Cameron Trading Post.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

BELL'S VIREO (*Vireo bellii*) – We never got a super look but a couple of birds were working around in the trees overhead at Page Springs.

GRAY VIREO (*Vireo vicinior*) – We heard a few and finally got good looks at this local specialty on the slopes of Gray Mountain.

PLUMBEOUS VIREO (*Vireo plumbeus*)

WARBLING VIREO (*Vireo gilvus*) – These were quite common by voice in the aspens of the Hart Prairie area.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – After a quick view on our first morning we had great close looks at a couple of birds that came to the water bath on the back porch of the house. This is another specialty of the Flagstaff area and the site where it was studied extensively for 35 years by biologists at NAU.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – We had brilliant views of one in great light on our first morning while we were trying to track down the Pinyon Jays.

WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB-JAY (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*) – A recent split; we saw a couple in the Sedona area.

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – We saw a couple of loudly calling individuals perching in the taller trees in the Hart Prairie area. This is an iconic bird of the mountain west.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – We heard a few right at dusk while looking at the Burrowing Owls north of Flagstaff.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – A few were flying about Montezuma Well.

PURPLE MARTIN (*Progne subis*) – We had one or two flying about Mormon Lake. This is a quite local species in northern Arizona. This southwest form does not nest in martin houses, preferring to nest in natural cavities.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – We saw a couple of individuals flying around the ponds at the Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – This was the common swallow we saw each day.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*)

BRIDLED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) – We saw a pair with a young bird following along while we were birding along the banks of Oak Creek.

JUNIPER TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – We had nice looks at a couple of birds that may have been near a nest in the Montezuma Well area.

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*) – A truly desert bird in Arizona, we saw our first at the rest stop along I-17 and again near Montezuma Well.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – We only heard these in the mixed-conifer forests near Hart Prairie. [✱]

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*)

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*) – We had nice looks at these tiny nuthatches in town near the Lewis's Woodpecker nest.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*) – A couple or three came in to owl tooting near Hart Prairie.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – We had great looks at Montezuma Well.

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – Amazingly, we only heard these at the Grand Canyon. They must have been at a point in their nesting cycle where they were quiet. [✱]

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – Nice looks along Oak Creek.

CACTUS WREN (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*) – We saw two birds near Montezuma Well where they are at the furthest north place where they occur in central Arizona.

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – We had nice looks at a singing bird near Hart Prairie.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*) – We saw these in a few places, mostly in the pine forests.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – A male put on a great show right along the highway as we were near the base of the San Francisco Peaks. This is a dazzling color of blue.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – A great song.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – We had nice views of a singing bird at the Sawmill County Park in Flagstaff where this bird has been regularly seen for the last two summers. This is a quite uncommon species in Arizona but this bird has been reliable.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Jeff spotted our only one along the base of Gray Mountain after leaving Grand Canyon.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [II]

Ptiliognatidae (Silky-flycatchers)

PHAINOPEPLA (*Phainopepla nitens*) – A good number of these unusual birds were around John and Becky's house where they were likely feeding on mulberries.

Peucedramidae (Olive Warbler)

OLIVE WARBLER (*Peucedramus taeniatus*) – At our first stop on the way into Hart Prairie, we heard one singing and soon had great looks at a one-year old male. This is a species that was not found in the Flagstaff area when I first came to Arizona, but it has become rather regular in many sites since. This species is now the sole member of its family.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – We had good views of a singing bird in Hart Prairie.

LUCY'S WARBLER (*Oreothlypis luciae*) – Another desert species that showed well at the rest stop on I-17.

VIRGINIA'S WARBLER (*Oreothlypis virginiae*) – Our best views were on our first morning in Hart Prairie where we saw them in the willows.

MAGGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) – A good number were singing in the willows in Hart Prairie and we had great looks in the open of this usual skulker.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – These were best seen at Kachina Wetlands.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – Another quite rare species. I heard one from my bedroom window when I got up on our last morning of birding. After meeting all of you we dashed back and had nice looks at this eastern vagrant.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – These were a fair number in the cottonwoods along Oak Creek.

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

GRACE'S WARBLER (*Setophaga graciae*) – We had close views of a singing bird at John and Becky's house in the canyon.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*)

RED-FACED WARBLER (*Cardellina rubrifrons*) – There were a handful of singing birds in the mixed-conifer forest near Hart Prairie and we had great views of this wonderful bird as it sat perched for quite awhile. This was Karen's 600th!

PAINTED REDSTART (*Myioborus pictus*) – A gorgeous individual showed up amongst the yellow columbine along the rushing water in Oak Creek Canyon.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT (*Icteria virens*) – A very cooperative individual perched up for us along Oak Creek at John and Becky's house. It is rare to get this furtive species in a scope.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW (*Spizella atrogularis*) – We had great views of a close singing bird near Gray Mountain. This is a chaparral species that is more of a Great Basin species than a southern Arizona bird.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – I believe our only one was a young bird at Marble Canyon where we saw the condors.

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*) – This colorful sparrow showed well south of Flagstaff.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (RED-BACKED) (*Junco hyemalis dorsalis*) – This form of Dark-eyed Junco is rather common in the forests around town.

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*) – Our first were at Kachina Wetlands on our first afternoon.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Our only ones were along Oak Creek south of Sedona.

ABERT'S TOWHEE (*Melospiza aberti*) – A pair showed well for us at John and Becky's house. This is a riparian species in Arizona.

RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW (*Aimophila ruficeps*) – We scoped a singing bird near Montezuma Well.

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – There were a good number of these perching up and singing in Hart Prairie where it certainly is the best place to see this bird in Arizona.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

HEPATIC TANAGER (*Piranga flava*) – A species we could not find together, but after we dropped folks at the airport Christine and I, on the way to the van shuttle in Flagstaff, made a quick stop on the slopes of the hill below Lowell Observatory and found a pair of these in the pine-oak woodland.

SUMMER TANAGER (*Piranga rubra*) – A few were seen in riparian sites south of Flagstaff.

WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – A nicely colored male was near our Three-toed Woodpecker on our first full day in the field.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) – We saw a couple including an oddly plumaged bird in Hart Prairie that has more white in the wing than normal and an odd placement of yellow on the rest of the bird. This individual has been in this site for about four years.

LAZULI BUNTING (*Passerina amoena*) – A great bird to finish with, we had a wonderful look at a singing bird along the Rio de Flag in town on our last afternoon. This was an especially colorful individual.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – A fair number were seen and heard at Mormon Lake.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – Always a treat, we saw a few at Kachina Wetlands.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – These were the most common right around Flagstaff.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

HOODED ORIOLE (*Icterus cucullatus*) – A female bird was seen along lower Oak Creek.

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE (*Icterus bullockii*) – We had nice looks at a colorful male during dinner on our deck.

SCOTT'S ORIOLE (*Icterus parisorum*) – A full adult male made a brief appearance but we had better views of a singing one-year old male along the slopes of Gray Mountain.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – At Hart Prairie we saw a couple of pairs feeding on the cones in a Douglas fir. They stayed put for a scope view.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*)

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

MAMMALS

CLIFF CHIPMUNK (*Tamias dorsalis*) – These were seen several times at Grand Canyon.

GRAY-COLLARED CHIPMUNK (*Tamias cinereicollis*) – Larry spotted one near Mormon Lake. This species has a quite limited range.

ROCK SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – Wow, these are really common at Grand Canyon.

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus lateralis*)

GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) – We saw a few in various places.

ABERT'S SQUIRREL (*Sciurus aberti*) – This colorful squirrel that has also been called Tassel-eared Squirrel was seen in the pine forests and in town a few times.

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*) – After a quick view for some near the Grand Canyon, we had nice looks at many at Mormon Lake.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – We saw several.

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*) – We watched a large individual walk up to the water tank for a long drink right at dusk at the Burrowing Owl site.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Other creatures we encountered during our wanderings:

Herps:

Collared Lizard

Plateau Fence Lizard

Common Sagebrush Lizard

Greater Earless Lizard - this is what we thought was Zebra-tailed Lizard

Sonoran Mud Turtle

Courtesy of Larry, here is his list of leps and odonates.

Butterflies

Western Tiger Swallowtail

Two-Tailed Swallowtail

Desert Black Swallowtail

California Patch

Arachne Checkerspot

Common Ringlet

Boisduval's Blue

Mourning Cloak

Mexican Cloudywing

Mournful Duskywing

Queen

Echo Azure

Marine Blue

Orange Sulphur

Dainty Sulphur

Cabbage White

Common Buckeye

Painted Lady

Variegated Fritillary

Juniper Hairstreak

Southern Dogface

Dragonflies

Variegated Meadowhawk

Widow Skimmer

Flame Skimmer

Russet-tipped Clubtail

Common Green Darner

Damselflies

Canyon Rubyspot

Springwater Dancer

Totals for the tour: 139 bird taxa and 9 mammal taxa