

Rufous-backed Robin (*Turdus rufopalliatus*), Pinal County

Photographic summary and notes on identification.

Mark Stevenson

If an American Robin and a Rufous-backed Robin were foraging together on a manicured lawn, most people could readily distinguish them. Back in the real world of Arizona in winter, it's much more common for these birds to forage in vegetation that allows only fleeting partial views. When searching for a Rufous-backed, there are several features beyond the color of the back that can help you to separate them.



Photo by Matt Brown



Photos by Pierre Deviche

If all you can see is the head remember that most winter American Robins will show a bold pale eye ring on a gray-to-black face while Rufous-backed won't. With preparation or experience, you may be also able to distinguish between the shades of gray to black on the birds' head and nape, but shadowing or bright light or pale females can render this feature misleading. With a view from below, the marked differences in streaking and coloration on the throat and upper breast can be very apparent. If all you can see is part of the wing, look for rufous in the coverts and flight feathers. There won't be any on an American Robin.



11 April 2006 photo by Charlie Wright

A fleeting glimpse of any of these features most often isn't enough to make certain the identification. But with prior preparation, these bits and pieces can be discerned, helping you to sort through robins lurking in the twigs, guiding you on which one to work harder to get a better view of. Chance favors the prepared mind.



8 January 2006 photo by Oliver Niehuis