

ARIZONA BIRD HIGHLIGHTS, FALL 2021

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The 2020 fall season (1 August-30 November) was particularly noteworthy in Arizona for the substantial number of rare birds reported and the unusually high totals for some migrants. Most were passerines, particularly warblers, finches, and sparrows (Jenness 2021). This article will contrast those highlights with reports from the same period in 2021 and note exceptional sightings for 2021. Reports are from eBird unless otherwise noted.

Ruddy Ground Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*) numbers did not match its unusually high fall totals in 2020. That year at least 104 Ruddy Ground Doves were reported from 12 of the state's 15 counties during the fall season. In 2021 only 11 had been reported in 6 counties by 1 December.

Berylline Hummingbird (*Saucerottia beryllina*), not reported every year, had 2 reports in the fall of 2021, both in Cochise County: Ramsey Canyon Inn in the Huachuca Mountains, 5 August-24 September, and Crystal Cave Trail in the Chiricahua Mountains, 8 August-9 September.

SHOREBIRDS

Shorebird numbers were particularly outstanding in the fall of 2021. An American Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*) visited Spot Road Farm, Yuma County, 22-26 September. It is the eighth fall record in the past 15 years. Rarely reported in the state, a Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) was observed by many birders at Paloma Ranch, western Maricopa County, 30 August (ABC 2021a). If accepted by the ABC, this will be the fifth state record and the second for Maricopa County. An Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*) was photographed at the Santa Cruz Flats, Pinal County, 28 September (Figure 1; ABC 2021a). If accepted by the ABC, it will be the eighth fall report for the state in 15 years, and the fourth record for Pinal County. Two Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) were at John Lake Playa, Coconino County, 26-27 August (ABC 2021a). If accepted by the ABC, this will be the eighth state record in the past 15 years and the first record for Coconino County.



Figure 1. Upland Sandpiper, Santa Cruz Flats (Pinal County), 28 September 2021. Photo by Steve Kessel

Three reports of Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) were from: John Lake Playa, Coconino County, 28 August (ABC 2021a); Paloma Ranch, Maricopa County, 31 August-27 September (ABC 2021a); and Spot Road Farm, Yuma County, 22 September (ABC 2021a). Up to 2 were at Paloma Ranch. Two Ruffs (*Philomachus pugnax*) were reported, both from Pinal County: 1 each at dairy farm ponds in Maricopa, 9 September (ABC 2021a), and the Santa Cruz Flats, 14-18 October (ABC 2021a). This was the second consecutive year this shorebird has been reported in Pinal County, and if the reports are accepted by the ABC, they will be the fourth and fifth records for the county.

Another rarity, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*), was photographed at John Lake Playa, Coconino County, 29-30 September (ABC 2021a). If accepted by the ABC, this will be the fourth fall record in the past 15 years, the eighth state record (Rosenberg and Rademaker 2021), and the second record for Coconino County.



Figures 2 and 3. Dunlin, Glendale Recharge Ponds (Maricopa County), 17 October 2021. Photo by Pierre Deviche (l); and Sanderling, Glendale Recharge Ponds (Maricopa County), 25 September 2020. Photo by Marceline VandeWater (r)

Two sandpipers, Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*; Figure 2) and Sanderling (*Calidris alba*; Figure 3), reported in small numbers every year, made an exceptional showing (Table 1). Both species recorded their highest 15-year totals. Less rare, the number of Stilt Sandpipers (*Calidris himantopus*) reported was unusually high. Most striking was a report of 175 individuals at Cochise Lake, Cochise County, 19 September (Stejskal and Rosenberg 2021). This was the highest fall record for Cochise County and for Arizona. Four other counties—Coconino (13), La Paz (5), Pinal (12), and Yuma (11)—also registered their highest fall totals of Stilt Sandpiper at one location on the same day (eBird 2021).

Most remarkable was the first documented report of an American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) in Arizona. Discovered on 6 November at Cave Creek Canyon in the Chiricahua Mountains (Marble 2022), Cochise County, it continued through at least 15 November. If accepted by the ABC, it will bring the number of species documented in Arizona to 568 (ABC 2021b).

Typically, at least one Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) shows up in the fall, and in 2020 a record 6 were reported. In contrast, none were reported in the fall of 2021, although one was reported in December (Table 1).

Table 1: Fall Numbers of 3 Shorebirds, 2007-2021

	Dunlin	Sanderling	Red Phalarope
Year	No.	No.	No.
2007	15	1	1
2008	7	4	0
2009	40	8	1
2010	17	7	1
2011	22	18	2
2012	24	15	0
2013	32	3	3
2014	13	6	0
2015	9	8	1
2016	10	13	0
2017	13	12	1
2018	12	10	3
2019	18	10	3
2020	29	15	6
2021	43	29	0
Ave.	20.3	10.6	1.5

Source: NAB 2007-2013; eBird 2021

JAEGERS, GULLS, AND FRIGATEBIRDS

For only the third fall in the past 15 years all 3 species of jaeger were reported. An adult Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) was reported at San Carlos Lake, Gila and Pinal counties, 8 October (ABC 2021a). A juvenile Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) was at Lake Havasu, Mohave County, 12 September. After a juvenile Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) was reported at Roosevelt Lake, Gila County, 8 September, an adult and another juvenile joined it on the following day (Figure 4). At least 1 juvenile continued to 15 September. An immature Long-tailed Jaeger was also at Lake Havasu, Mohave County, 15 September. The ABC (2021a) is reviewing all 4 reports. If accepted, the Long-tailed Jaeger will be a new county record for Gila County, and the Pomarine Jaeger will be the second record for Pinal and Gila counties.

Three Black-legged Kittiwakes (*Rissa tridactyla*) were reported: 1 in Marana at the Santa Cruz River and Ina Road bridge, Pima County, 6 November; 1 at San Carlos Lake, Pinal County, 8 November; and 1 at the Glendale Recharge Ponds, Maricopa County, 25 November (ABC 2021a). If accepted by the ABC they will be the second records for Pima and Pinal counties. One Short-billed Gull (*Larus brachyrhynchus*; formerly Mew Gull), was reported at Lake Pleasant, Yavapai and Maricopa counties, 27 November and continued into the winter season (ABC 2021a).

The gull highlight of the season was the state's second record of a Yellow-footed Gull (*Larus livens*; Figure 5). The juvenile bird, discovered at Lake Havasu, Mohave County, 10 September, continued through the winter (ABC 2021a). The only previous record for Arizona was a subadult at Lake Powell, Coconino County, 21-23 April 1999 (Rosenberg 2001). The Yellow-footed Gull is an endemic breeder at the Sea of Cortez in Mexico and regularly winters at the Salton Sea in California. An Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*; formerly Thayer's Gull), another rarity, was at Lake Mohave, Mohave County, 15 November (Figure 6). The first Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) reported in Arizona was in 2006 (Rosenberg et al. 2011). Since then, reports have increased and at least one has been reported in all but one year in the past decade. In 2020 a record 7 were reported. Two were reported in the fall of 2021, the first at San Carlos Lake, 25 October-13 November, where it was observed in Pinal, Gila, and Graham counties (ABC 2021a). If accepted by the ABC it will be the first record for Pinal and Graham counties and the second for Gila County. The second report was at the Glendale Recharge Ponds, Maricopa County, 16 November (ABC 2021a).

An immature Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) was reported along I-19 near Sahuarita, Pima County 28 September (ABC 2021a).



Figure 4. Long-tailed Jaeger, adult (back) and immature (front), Roosevelt Lake (Gila County), 9 September 2021. Photo by Chris McCreedy



Figure 5. Yellow-footed Gull, Lake Havasu (Mohave County), 22 September 2021. Photo by Keith Kamper



Figure 6. Iceland Gull, Lake Mohave (Mohave County), 15 November. Photo by Chris McCreedy

WOODPECKERS, FLYCATCHERS, AND VIREOS

A Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) was briefly at Arthur Pack Regional Park in Marana, Pima County, 27 September (ABC 2021a; Figure 7). If accepted by the ABC this will be eleventh state record, but remarkably, this was the third Red-headed Woodpecker reported in Arizona in 2021.

Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*), an eastern North America species, was reported at 3 locations: Meteor Crater RV Park, Coconino County, 28 August; Barry M. Goldwater Range-West, Yuma County, 14 September; and Sonoita Creek, Santa Cruz County, 1 November into winter. The ABC has accepted the latter 2 reports; the Coconino County report is still being reviewed (C. Benesh pers. comm.).

A Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*), seen and heard at the Riggs and Price roads ponds in Chandler, Maricopa County, 3 November until February, was unusual for that period.

There was one report of White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) from Patagonia, Santa Cruz County, 8 November. Many observers enjoyed a rare Blue-headed Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*) along the Verde River near the Rio Verde Ranch, Maricopa County, 19 November into December (ABC 2021a). If accepted by the ABC, it will be the seventh record for Arizona.



Figure 7. Red-headed Woodpecker, Marana (Pima County), 27 September 2021. Photo by Craig Thayer/Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab (ML373049451)

JAYS, THRUSHES, AND THRASHERS

An outstanding feature of the fall 2021 season was a notably high number of jay reports from lower elevations. Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*) were frequently found below their normal oak-juniper habitats, and a striking number of Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) were reported at parks, yards, and other low-elevation locations near Tucson and Phoenix. Exceptional was a report of at least 61 Steller's Jays at Sycamore Canyon northeast of Phoenix, Maricopa County, 25 October (Karre and Durso 2021). At Peppersauce Canyon on the north side of the Santa Catalina Mountains, Pinal County, 25 Steller's Jays were reported in a 1.2 km stretch on 4 November. The high numbers continued at that location into winter and spring. This was the most extensive Steller's Jay irruption for any previous fall in the past 15 years (eBird 2021, AZFO 2007-16).

Rufous-backed Robins are no longer on the ABC's review list but are nonetheless rare and of great interest to birders. The species is primarily endemic to western Mexico but a few wander north each fall and winter with 1 breeding record in Arizona (Kondrat-Smith and Corman 2020). Numbers in 2021—14 in 7 counties—was down from 31 reported in 8 counties in 2020 but still relatively high (Table 2).

Table 2. Rufous-backed Robin and Varied Thrush Numbers, Fall 2007-2021

	RBRO	VATH
Year	No.	No.
2007	3	1
2008	1	7
2009	12	8
2010	4	7
2011	10	6
2012	7	6
2013	3	2
2014	4	4
2015	5	1
2016	5	2
2017	28	9
2018	1	4
2019	2	7
2020	31	9
2021	14	3
Ave.	8.7	5.1

Source: NAB 2007-2013, eBird 2021

Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) breeds primarily in the Pacific Northwest and winters south into California and rarely Arizona. In the fall of 2021, there were 3 reports: 1 each at Reid Park in Tucson, Pima County, 24-28 November; Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Pinal County, 26 November into December; and Sonora Desert Museum, Pima County, 29 November into December. This was below the 15-year fall average of 5.1 (Table 2).

A Wood Thrush was reported from Oatman in the Black Mountains, Mohave County, 22 October (ABC 2021a).

A Brown Thrasher was reported at each of the following locations: Oak Flat, Pinal County, 9 October; Morgan City Wash, Maricopa County, 26 October and likely the same one on 30 November; Molino Basin on Mt. Lemmon, Pima County, 10 November; and Horseshoe Lake, Maricopa County, 29-30 November. Two were at Holbrook, Navajo County, 17-22 October.

FINCHES

The extraordinary invasion of Pine Siskins and other finches in 2020 was not repeated in 2021. However, it was a good year for Lawrence's Goldfinch, a species found in oak habitat in California and Baja California. Lawrence's Goldfinches make unpredictable fall and winter incursions into the eastern Sonoran Desert region, particularly southern Arizona and northern Sonora (Corman and Rademaker 2005). As in 2020, there were dozens of reports of this goldfinch in 12 of the state's 15 counties, but numbers were higher in 2021 with fall reports of up to 40 (eBird 2021). The impressive numbers in 2020 and 2021, for example, were not matched in 2019, which had only 8 fall reports in 6 counties (eBird 2021).

WOOD WARBLERS AND BUNTINGS

In 2020, 39 species of wood warblers were reported during the fall, a 15-year high for Arizona (Jenness 2021). This record was not matched in 2021, with 32 warbler species reported, fewer than the 15-year average of 33 (eBird 2021). Most noteworthy was a Tropical Parula (*Setophaga pitiayumi*) reported at Morgan City Wash, Maricopa County, 20 September (ABC 2021a). If accepted by the Arizona Bird Committee, this will be only the second fall record for the state in the last 15 years, the second record for Maricopa County, and the northernmost sighting recorded for the state. A Canada Warbler (*Cardellina canadensis*) was reported along the De Anza Trail near Tubac, Santa Cruz County, 5 October (ABC 2021a). If accepted by the ABC, it will be the fourth fall record of this rare vagrant warbler in the past 15 years. Two of those records were in 2020. It is a second record for Santa Cruz County.

Other casual or rare warblers not reported in the state every fall were 1 Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) near the Sabino Canyon Dam, Pima County, 15 October, and 1 Kentucky Warbler (*Geothlypis formosa*) in the Rincon Mountains, Pima County, 3 November. One Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*) was found at Tres Rios Overbank Wetlands, Maricopa County, 25 October. Six Magnolia Warblers were reported in 2021 for comparison. Three Black-throated Blue Warblers (*Setophaga caerulescens*) were observed: 1 each at Santa Gertrudis Lane, Santa Cruz County, 8 October; Garden Canyon in the Chiricahua Mountains, Cochise County, 26-27 October; and Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Pinal County, 26 November into winter. The latter is Pinal County's eighth record. At least 7 Tennessee Warblers (*Oreothlypis peregrina*) were reported in 4 counties (Figure 8). Typically, 1 or 2 are reported every fall with the previous highs of 13 in 8 counties in 2020 and 8 in 5 counties in 2017.



Figure 8. Tennessee Warbler, Silverbell Park, Marana (Pima County), 21 November 2021. Photo by Cathy Beck

Lazuli Bunting made an unprecedented showing from late fall through winter. In southern Arizona, it is typically a spring and fall migrant, with scattered breeding records in southeastern Arizona. This species occurs annually in late November into winter in small numbers in southeastern Arizona, primarily in the Santa Cruz River/Sonoita Creek area. Comparing November reports for the past 10 years shows how extraordinary their late fall presence was in 2021 (Table 3). At some locations dozens of buntings were reported. This incursion continued into winter and 11 Christmas Bird Counts reported Lazuli Buntings, some for the first time (Audubon 2022).

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Table 3. November reports for Lazuli Bunting, 2012-2021

Year	Locations	No.	Counties
2012	6	14	3
2013	9	24	3
2014	17	40	3
2015	9	18	5
2016	13	31	3
2017	12	16	3
2018	33	72	4
2019	8	8	3
2020	7	9	3
2021	92	344	4
Ave.	20.6	57.6	3.4


Source: eBird (2021)

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