

ARIZONA BIRD HIGHLIGHTS, FALL 2023

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The fallout in August of several species of pelagic birds due to Hurricane Hilary, particularly along the lower Colorado River, was the most notable highlight of the fall 2023 season (1 August to 30 November). This note will describe the records generated by that event, as well as other fall highlights. Reports are from eBird unless otherwise noted (eBird 2023). Reports of Arizona Bird Committee (ABC) review species have been accepted except where noted (ABC 2023).

There were several noteworthy reports of waterfowl. A Fulvous Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) was present at the Lower River Road Ponds, Maricopa County, 16 to 19 November (Figure 1). The report has not been submitted to the ABC yet. Eight reports of Ross's Goose (*Anser rossii*) in 2 counties (Maricopa and Cochise) were fewer than the 14 reported in 4 counties in the previous fall. Similarly, the number of Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) was only 3 compared with 10 in the fall of 2022. Two scoter species were reported—3 White-winged Scoters (*Melanitta deglandi*) in Mohave and Coconino counties and 1 Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*) in Maricopa County.

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*), which was removed from the ABC's review list in 2022, was reported at 2 locations: up to 4 at Ruby Lakes, Santa Cruz County, continuing from July until 2 September; and one at Arivaca Lake, Pima County, 2 November. Horned Grebes (*Podiceps auritus*) were observed at 3 locations: up to 5 at Lake Pleasant in Maricopa and Yavapai counties, 13 to 24 November; one at Lake Havasu, Mohave County, 15 November; and 2 at Gilbert/Chandler Roads Ponds, Maricopa County, 31 October. Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*), which has in recent years been reported annually and was removed from the ABC's review list in 2015, was reported in 3 counties. Single birds were at Lake Havasu, Mohave County, 18 to 22 October; Lower River Road Ponds, Maricopa County, 28 October; and Walnut Canyon Lakes, Coconino County, 28 November into December.

Ruddy Ground Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*) numbers in the state fluctuate, like other species that are on the northern limits of their range. This fall, 73 were reported in 8 counties, which is substantially more than the 14 in 4 counties in the fall of 2022 and the 11 in 6 counties in the fall of 2021, but fewer than the 104 in 9 counties in 2020 (Jenness 2023). Buff-collared Nightjar (*Anurostomus ridgwayi*), rare in Arizona, nests very locally and typically leaves the state by mid-August. One was at California Gulch, Santa Cruz County, 2 August, and another at the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) lingered until 21 August.

Two Black Swifts (*Cypseloides niger*) were reported. The first was near Florence, 14 August, and if accepted by the ABC, will be the first record for Pinal County. It was the first live Black Swift to be photographed in the state. The second was at Rio Rico, Santa Cruz County, 20 September, and also awaits review by the ABC. Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*) is a regular fall migrant through the state as it moves from its nesting grounds in the Pacific northwest to its wintering locations in Mexico. This fall, 5 counties registered their record high numbers at a specific location (Table 1): Pima (357), Santa Cruz (98), Pinal (86), Graham (55), and Greenlee (2). At least one Berylline Hummingbird (*Saucerottia beryllina*) was reported in each of 4 areas: Ramsey Canyon Preserve, Cochise County, continuing from summer through 25 September; Madera Canyon, Santa Cruz County, continuing from summer through 3 October; Portal, Cochise County, continuing from summer through 26 August; and Paton Center in Patagonia, Santa Cruz County, 22 to 25 September.

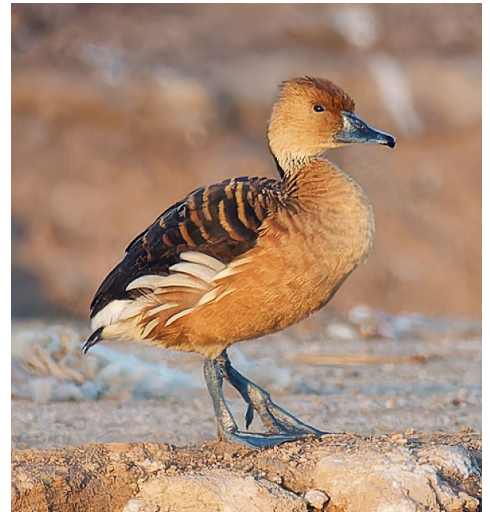


Figure 1. Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Lower River Ponds, Maricopa County, 17 November 2023. Photo by Pierre Deviche

Table 1. High Counts of Vaux's Swift in Arizona by County

County	No.	Date	Location
Pima	357	10-Oct-2023	Sweetwater Wetlands
Cochise	300	8-Sep-2022	Ash Canyon
Yuma	110	22-Apr-2022	Yuma West Wetlands
Santa Cruz	98	21-Sep-2023	Tumacacori
Pinal	86	15-Sep-2023	near Florence
Graham	55	21-Sep-2023	Coronado National Forest
Mohave	50	4-May-2007	Havasu National Wildlife Refuge
La Paz	45	15-May-1977	Parker Marsh
Maricopa	28	13-Sep-2016	Surprise
Coconino	25	20-Sep-2016	Page Water Treatment Plant
Yavapai	20	7-May-2016	Page Springs
Gila	9	26-Sep-2014	Shoofly Area
Apache	3	9-May-2013	Canyon de Chelly
Greenlee	2	13-Sep-2023	Duncan Birding Trail
Navajo	1	24-May-2021	Pintail Lake

Source: eBird 2023

Shorebird diversity was greater than in 2022, but not as high as in 2021, an outstanding year. There were several noteworthy appearances of exceedingly rare species that do not show up annually. Seven Snowy Plovers (*Anarhynchus nivosus*) were reported from 7 counties, which is about average (Jenness 2023). Reports of 2 Upland Sandpipers (*Bartramia longicauda*) have been submitted to the ABC: one each at Willcox, Cochise County, 18 August, and Green Valley, Pima County, 19 August. One Whimbrel, a casual transient more often reported in the spring, was along Indian Road 2 near John Lake Playa at the Navajo Nation, Coconino County, 2 to 14 September. A particularly notable high point of the fall season was the appearance of 2 Hudsonian Godwits (*Limosa haemastica*; Figure 2), which, if accepted by the ABC, will be the 10th state record. They were first reported at a sod farm at the Santa Cruz Flats, 23 August, and presumably the same 2 were reported again 24 August at a dairy near Stanfield 35 km to the northwest, where they continued until 17 September. Both locations are in Pinal County, and the reports are a first for the county. Of the previous records this was the first to be reported at 2 sites, only the second fall migration record, and only the second to have involved more than one bird (Table 2). Two Red Knots (*Calidris canutus*) were reported and are being reviewed by the ABC: one each at John Lake Playa, Navajo Nation, Coconino County, 19 August, and Willcox, Cochise County, 6-18 September. Another extreme rarity was a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) at a dairy near Stanfield, Pinal County, 15-18 October. If accepted by the ABC, this will be the ninth state record and the first for Pinal County (Table 3). Regular fall migrants, but typically in small numbers, included 8 Sanderlings (*Calidris alba*), 24 Dunlins (*Calidris alpina*), 7 Semipalmated Sandpipers (*Calidris pusilla*), and 3 Red Phalaropes (*Phalaropus fulicarius*). The Dunlin and Red Phalarope numbers were above average, the Semipalmated Sandpiper about average, and the Sanderling below average (Jenness 2023).



Figure 2. Hudsonian Godwit, Stanfield, Pinal County, 17 September 2023. Photo by Pierre Deviche

Table 2. Hudsonian Godwit in Arizona

Date	No.	Location	County
14-16 May 1976	1	Cochise Lake	Cochise
24-27 May 1986	1	Cochise Lake	Cochise
17-22 May 1988	3	Cochise Lake	Cochise
13-May-1996	1	Cochise Lake	Cochise
18-May-1996	1	Gila Bend	Maricopa
26-May-2003	1	Palo Verde	Maricopa
22-27 May 2012	1	Cochise Lake	Cochise
15-28 July 2016	1	Arlington Ave.	Maricopa
25 May-1 June 2021	1	Gila River Indian Community- Lone Butte	Maricopa
23 Aug- 17 Sep 2023	2	Santa Cruz Flats, Stanfield	Pinal

Source: Rosenberg and Witzeman 1998, eBird 2023

Table 3. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in Arizona

Date	Location	County
15-18 Oct 1972	Chandler	Maricopa
11-18 Oct 1985	Phoenix	Maricopa
2-3 Nov 2003	Paloma Ranch	Maricopa
28-Sep-2013	Near Gila Bend	Maricopa
7-8 May 2014	Rimmy Jim Tank	Coconino
28-Oct-2019	Patagonia Lake	Santa Cruz
29-Oct-2020	Spot Road Farm	Yuma
29-30 Sep 2021	John Lake Playa	Coconino
15-18 Oct 2023	Stanfield	Pinal

Source: Witzeman and Corman 2015, ABC 2023

Reports of 2 Pomarine Jaegers (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) are being reviewed by the ABC. The first was at the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (RNCA), Cochise County, 25 October, and the second was at Green Valley, Pima County, 8 to 11 November. The latter was sickly and taken to a wildlife rehabilitation center where it died. The ABC is also reviewing a Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) reported at Ajo, Pima County, 28 November. An adult Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides thayeri*) was at Lakeside Park in Tucson, Pima County, 13 to 15 October. If accepted by the ABC, this will be the first record for Pima County and possibly the first adult reported in Arizona. All Arizona records are of the *thayeri* subspecies lumped with Iceland Gull in 2017 (Chesser et al. 2017). A first-cycle Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) visited Parker Canyon Lake, Cochise County, 6 to 23 October. The ABC is reviewing the report. A first-cycle Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) showed up at Willow Lake in Prescott, Yavapai County, 13 to 17 November. This was the first report in the state since 2014, and if accepted by the ABC, will be the seventh state record and a first for Yavapai County. Most reports of Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*) in Arizona are from along the lower Colorado River. One at Sahuarita Lake, 28 to 29 October, was a surprise first record for Pima County.

Hurricane Hilary made landfall midday on 20 August in southern California and northern Baja California and, by evening, was a tropical storm that brought strong upper-level winds to Yuma and parts of the lower Colorado River valley north of there. Many pelagic birds dropped out over the desert and were attracted to the lakes in the area, particularly Lake Havasu. An unusually large number of Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*) moved into the lower Colorado

River valley, and a group at Martinez Lake, Yuma County, on 20 August set a new state high of 190, surpassing the previous high of 130 observed in 2022 (Jenness 2023). An Elegant Tern (*Thalasseus elegans*), which is more likely to show up in the state in late spring or early summer, was blown in. It was seen in Yuma County on 20 August first at Imperial Dam, and likely the same bird later the same day at Mittry Lake Overlook. If submitted to and accepted by the ABC, it will be a second record for Yuma County.

The following day, alert birders were able to locate a very active immature Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*) at Lake Havasu from vantage points in La Paz and Mohave counties. If accepted by the ABC, it will be the ninth state record for this pelagic species. Most earlier reports were of exhausted grounded birds. Three species of storm-petrels were blown in by the storm, and all were observed at Lake Havasu, Mohave County on 21 August. The totals were a state record high 17 Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels (*Hydrobates tethys*); 2 Black Storm-Petrels (*Hydrobates melania*); and 35 Least Storm-Petrels (*Hydrobates microsoma*). Most were reported from Pittsburgh Point early in the morning and all await review by the ABC. More storm-petrels were seen but were too distant to identify to species. Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) made a record showing for the state of 11 on 20 August in the Imperial Dam area of Yuma County.

Typically, some immature Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*), which fledge near the Sea of Cortez southwest of Arizona, wander into the state in the late summer and early fall. In 2023, 10 were reported from 5 counties. The numbers for the previous 4 years are 2 in 2 counties (2022); 10 in 5 counties (2021); 10 in 5 counties (2020); and 4 in 3 counties (2019).

American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*), a rare fall transient was reported at 3 locations in Pima County: Avra Valley, 16 October; Arivaca Lake, 17 October; and Sam Lena Park in Tucson, 19 October to 6 November. Two others were at Willow Lake, Yavapai County, 24 October, and Tres Rios Overbank Wetlands, Maricopa County, 25 to 28 October. An immature Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) was at the Meteor Crater RV park, 23 September, marking only the second record for Coconino County. Only one Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*) was reported; it was at a dairy farm near Stanfield, Pinal County, 21 September. A Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*), first reported 18 November at Gilbert Water Ranch, Maricopa County, continued into the winter. If accepted by the ABC, it will be the sixth state record and the second for Maricopa County. Casual in Arizona, a White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) was seen by many observers at farm fields west of Phoenix from the Lower River Road Ponds into the Arlington area 15 November through the winter (Figure 3). If submitted to and accepted by the ABC, there will be over a dozen records for the state.



Figure 3. White Ibis, Arlington, Maricopa County, 17 November 2023. Photo by Pierre Deviche

Two Swallow-tailed Kites (*Elanoides forficatus*), accidental in Arizona, were reported: 6 August, Patagonia Lake, Santa Cruz County and 4 September, Holbrook, Navajo County. If accepted by the ABC, they will be the third and fourth records for Arizona. Short-tailed Hawks (*Buteo brachyurus*) were reported at 4 locations: up to 3 were in the upper areas of the Santa Catalina Mountains, Pima County, from the summer through 22 September; 1 was at Leslie Canyon NWR in the Chiricahua Mountains, Cochise County, 11 August; 1 in the Pinaleno Mountains, Graham County, 17 August; and 1 at Hunter Canyon in the Huachuca Mountains, Cochise County, 1 September. Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*) is a rare and declining fall transient and winter visitor, and all 4 reports were from Coconino County, 3 from Grand Canyon National Park (NP) and 1 from Rimmy Jim Tank. A lingering Elf Owl (*Micrathene whitneyi*) was near Portal at Cave Creek Canyon, Cochise County, 7 October.

Nine Red-breasted Sapsuckers (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) were reported in 4 counties. A Downy Woodpecker (*Dryobates pubescens*) at Roper Lake State Park, Graham County, 13 September, was unusual at this low elevation and this far south. Reports of Crested Caracara (*Caracara plancus*) in western Arizona, possibly involving the same adult bird, were highly unusual. One was photographed on the morning of 14 November at the Aztec Feedlot near Dateland, Yuma County, and the second was observed just south of Parker, La Paz County late the same afternoon (pers. comm.). There is only one previous record for La Paz County (8 December 1980) and not many for Yuma County.

Maricopa County, which had its first record of Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) in 2022, surprisingly had 2 reports in the fall of 2023, the first at the Riggs/Price Roads pond, 23 to 24 September, and the second at Tres Rios Overbank Wetlands, 28 to 29 October. The ABC is reviewing both reports. Also, at the Riggs/Price Roads ponds, a Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) was found lingering 13 to 18 November. Two years earlier one was also found there in November. A Couch’s Kingbird (*Tyrannus couchi*) was photographed and sound recorded at Ron Morriss Park in Tubac, 16 to 19 November. If accepted by the ABC, this will be a first for Santa Cruz County. A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) was reported in Sierra Vista, Cochise County, 17 to 18 August. Starting to show up more often in the state, a Tufted Flycatcher (*Mitrephanes phaeocercus*) was at Cave Creek Canyon in the Chiricahua Mountains, Cochise County, 8 September to 21 October. The report has not yet been reviewed by the ABC. The third Maricopa County record for Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*), if accepted by the ABC, was seen by many observers between 3 August and 7 October at the Gilbert Water Ranch. The last record for Maricopa was in 1986. A report of a Blue-headed Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*; Figure 4) at Willow Lake in Prescott, 18 to 20 September, is being reviewed by the ABC.

Since spring 2018, up to 2 LeConte’s Thrashers (*Toxostoma lecontei*) have been reported fairly consistently from the western boundary of the Ironwood National Monument in Pima County. One was reported from 4 to 18 November. This is currently the easternmost location in the state where this species is being reported. Fourteen Rufous-backed Robins (*Turdus rufopalliatus*) in 7 counties, and 8 Varied Thrushes (*Ixoreus naevius*) in 5 counties were above average totals for both species (Table 4).

Two Purple Finches (*Haemorhous purpureus*) were observed in San Simon, Cochise County, 16 November, and a group of 5 were at Aspen Springs in Prescott National Forest (NF), Yavapai County, 26 November, where they appear to be regular in fall and winter. All were of the more expected western subspecies (*H. p. californicus*). The only Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*) reported from the Sooty (*unalaschcensis*) group, rare in Arizona, was at a private residence near Maricopa, Pinal County, 11 to 14 November (Figure 5).



Figure 4. Blue-headed Vireo, Prescott, Yavapai County, 18 September 2023. Photo by Tommy DeBardeleben

Table 4. Rufous-backed Robin and Varied Thrush Numbers, Fall 2007-2023

Year	RBRO	VATH
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
2022	4	3
2023	14	8
Ave.	8.7	5.1

Source: NAB 2007-2013, eBird 2023

Two Streak-backed Orioles (*Icterus pustulatus*) were observed at the Gilbert Water Ranch, Maricopa County, from 19 November into the winter season. Another was at the Arivaca Cienega in the Buenos Aires NWR, Santa Cruz County, 28 November into December. A Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*) was photographed at Redhead Marsh, Navajo County, 27 to 29 November. This species is now seen nearly every year in the state and was removed from the ABC's review list in 2023. A Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) was reported from a private yard in Bisbee, Cochise County, 7 October. This rare (in Arizona) species was removed from the ABC's review list in 2021.

During the fall, 37 wood warbler species were reported, fewer than the 39 the previous year, but more than the 17-year average of 34. Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) was reported at 3 locations: Portal, Cochise County, 1 October; Joseph City, Navajo County, 8 October; and Phoenix, Maricopa County, 11 to 17 November. Six Louisiana Waterthrushes (*Parkesia motacilla*) were reported: Sweetwater Wetlands, Tucson, 5 August; Madera Canyon, 7 to 14 August; Buenos Aires NWR, 19 to 21 August; White-tail Canyon, Chiricahua Mountains, 29 August; San Pedro RNCA, 10 September to 25 October; and Cienega Creek Preserve southeast of Tucson, 19 October. An outstanding highlight was the report of 8 Prothonotary Warblers (*Protonotaria citrea*; Figure 6) from 6 counties. In the past 10 years this species has been reported every fall, but the highest number was only 3. Two Cape May Warblers (*Setophaga tigrina*) were reported: one at Grand Canyon NP, Coconino County, 8 October, and one in a yard in Sierra Vista, Cochise County, 30 October. The ABC is reviewing the latter. The report of a Bay-breasted Warbler (*S. castanea*) at Arivaca Lake, Pima County, 5 to 8 November, is being reviewed by the ABC. A Blackburnian Warbler (*S. fusca*) was at Hassayampa River Preserve, Maricopa County, 17 November. This species was removed from the ABC's review list in 2022. A Yellow-throated Warbler (*S. dominica*) was at Rotary Park in Lake Havasu City, Mohave County, 15 September, and likely the same bird was reported again 6 October. Another Yellow-throated Warbler was discovered at Lakeside Park in Tucson on 19 October and continued into January 2024. Two Black-throated Green Warblers (*S. virens*) were reported—one in Chandler, Maricopa County, 20 to 25 October and one in Tucson, Pima County, 19 November. This rare species was removed from the ABC's review list in 2023. A Canada Warbler (*Cardellina canadensis*) was observed at Moon Valley Park, north of Phoenix, Maricopa County, 13 to 18 September. If accepted by the ABC, it will be the 21st state record.

An adult male Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) was reported at Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Pinal County, 25 October (Figure 7). This was the third record for Pinal County and the first since 2008. Another male was at the Hassayampa River Preserve, Maricopa County, 16 to 17 November. Up to 2 nesting Flame-colored Tanagers (*Piranga bidentata*) in Miller Canyon in the Huachuca Mountains, Cochise County, continued from the summer until 17 August. At least one was observed



Figure 5. Sooty Fox Sparrow, Maricopa, Pinal County. 13 November 2023. Photo by Tim DeJonghe



Figure 6. Prothonotary Warbler, Silverbell Lake, Pima County, 11 September 2023. Photo by Tim DeJonghe



Figure 7. Scarlet Tanager, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Pinal County, 25 October 2023. Photo by Roy Jones

feeding a cowbird nestling. An immature male Flame-colored Tanager visited a private residence in Bisbee, Cochise County, from 16 August to 13 September. The ABC is reviewing both reports.

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