ARIZONA BIRD HIGHLIGHTS, FALL 2024

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A notable feature of the fall 2024 season (1 August to 30 November) was that very dry conditions in much of the state concentrated a larger than usual number of migrant birds at water sources in parks, yards, and other similar areas. This note will describe the results of this, as well as other fall highlights. Reports are from eBird unless otherwise noted (eBird 2024). The reports of Arizona Bird Committee (ABC) review species have yet to be voted on by the ABC, and where reports of review-list species have not yet been submitted, observers are encouraged to do so.

Figure 1. Cackling Geese, Walnut Canyon Lakes, Cochise County, 25 October 2024. Photo by Jason Wilder

Seven Ross's Geese (*Anser rossii*) in 4 counties (Cochise, Pima, Pinal, and Maricopa), all in November, were fewer than the 14 reported in 4 counties in the fall of 2023. Twelve Cackling Geese (*Branta hutchinsii*) were in 3 counties (Cochise, Coconino, and Maricopa) compared with 3 in 2 counties in the fall of 2023. Up to 10 were in the Walnut Canyon Lakes area in Coconino County (Figure 1). A Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*), casual in Arizona and reported only once before in Pinal County, was reported at the Apache Creek Golf Club ponds in Apache Junction, 29 November. A Tundra Swan was at Fountain Hills in Maricopa County on 14 November, and another was reported from the Havasu National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Mohave County, 29 November. Three Eurasian Wigeons (*Mareca penelope*), a rare vagrant, were the most for the fall season since 2020. They were at the Faria Dairy, Cochise County, 4 to 24 November; Scottsdale, Maricopa County, 15 November into December; and the Gila River Indian Community, Pinal County, 29 November into winter. Two scoter species were reported—4 Surf Scoters (*Melanitta perspicillata*) were in Maricopa County, 2 at Lake Pleasant, 27 October to 2 November, and 2 at Horseshoe Reservoir on 31 October. Two were reported from Coconino County, 1 at Ashurst Lake, 16 October to 2 November, and 1 at the Walnut Canyon Lakes, 11 to 18 November. A Black Scoter (*M. americana*) was at Lake Pleasant, 29 October to 2 November. Two Long-tailed Ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*) were also at Lake Pleasant on 7 November.

Reports of Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) have increased in recent years, and it was removed from the ABC's review list in 2018. One was reported at Cattail Cove State Park, Mohave County on 22 September. Twelve Horned Grebes (*P. auritus*) were reported from Mohave County—2 at Lake Mohave on 12 November and 10 at Lake Havasu on 29 November.

Twenty-two Ruddy Ground Doves (*Columbina talpacoti*) were reported in 5 counties, which is far fewer than the 73 reported in 8 counties in 2023 but more than the 14 in 4 counties in the fall of 2022 and the 11 in 6 counties in the fall of 2021 (Jenness 2023, 2024). Two Black Swifts (*Cypseloides niger*) were reported from a residence near Florence, 24 August and 22 September. One was reported the previous fall at the same location, which was the first record for Pinal County (Jenness 2024, Rosenberg and Core 2024).

Two Plain-capped Starthroats (*Heliomaster constantii*) were reported in Santa Cruz County. One was at Madera Canyon 15 to 23 September, and the second was at Tubac from 18 September to 20 October. A Broad-billed Hummingbird (*Cynanthus latirostris*), observed 18 September at a private residence in Flagstaff, Coconino County, was very unusual at this northern location. A Berylline Hummingbird (*Saucerottia beryllina*), continuing from summer at the Southwestern Research Station at Cave Creek, Cochise County, was last reported 5 September. Another was at Madera Canyon, Santa Cruz County, which continued from 25 October into the winter season.

An adult Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinica*) was at Willow Lake in Prescott, 4 to 10 August. It was the second record for Yavapai County (pers. comm. C. Tomoff).

Table 1. Fall Numbers of 5 Shorebirds-- 2007-2024

	Dunlin	Sanderling	Red Phalarope	Semipalmated Sandpiper	Snowy Plover
Year	**No.**	**No.**	**No.**	**No.**	**No.**
2007	15	1	1	12	Several
2008	7	4	0	9	2
2009	40	14	1	22	2
2010	17	7	1	11	8
2011	22	18	2	12	7
2012	24	15	0	9	2
2013	32	3	3	8	9
2014	13	6	0	8	4
2015	9	8	1	10	12
2016	10	13	0	19	5
2017	13	12	1	17	4
2018	12	10	3	17	13
2019	18	10	3	15	10
2020	29	15	6	11	11
2021	43	29	0	18	10
2022	11	4	0	10	5
2023	24	8	3	10	7
2024	30	12	5	10	10
Ave.	**20.5**	**10.5**	**1.7**	**12.7**	**7.1**

Source: NAB 2007-2013; eBird 2024

Table 2. Buff -breasted Sandpiper in Arizona

Date	Location	County	No.
11 to 12 Sept 2002	Paloma Ranch	Maricopa	1
22 to 29 Sept 2002	Rousseau Sod Farm	Maricopa	1
31 Aug to 4 Sept 2007	Marana	Pinal/Pima	1
11 to 16 Sept 2007	Paloma Ranch	Maricopa	2
25 to 30 Sept 2007	Rousseau Sod Farm	Maricopa	1
3 Oct 2011	Lake Havasu City	Mohave	1
9 to 26 Oct 2024	Evergreen Turf Sod Farm	Pinal	1

Source: Rosenberg et al. 2007, 2011, 2017; Rosenberg and Core 2024

There were a couple of shorebird rarities, but overall diversity and numbers were about average. Two American Golden-Plovers (*Pluvialis dominica*) were reported, 1 at Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area (WA), Cochise County, 1 to 10 October, and another at the Evergreen Turf sod farm in Stanfield, Pinal County, on 11 October. Ten Snowy Plovers (*Anarhynchus nivosus*) in 6 counties were more than in the past several years (Table 1). Twelve Whimbrels (*Numenius phaeopus*) at Bill Williams NWR, La Paz County, on 15 September was the highest number ever reported for the fall season in the state. A single Whimbrel was at Cochise Lake in Wilcox, Cochise County, 25 September to 3 October. This species is a casual transient, more often reported in the spring. The 2 most noteworthy fall shorebirds were a Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) at Cochise Lake, 10 to 12 September and a Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Calidris subruficollis*) at Evergreen Turf sod farm at the Santa Cruz Flats, Pinal County, 9 to 26 October (Figure 2). The Buff-breasted Sandpiper report will be the seventh record for Arizona and the second for Pinal County. It will also be the latest record and the one that was reported present for the longest time (Table 2). Baird's Sandpiper (*Calidris bairdii*), a common migrant in late summer–early fall and rare in spring, was reported from San Carlos Lake, Pinal County on 11 November (Figure 3) and the Ajo sewage ponds, Pima County, 27 November. It is casual at these dates with only 6 previous November reports for the state. Regular fall migrants, but typically in small numbers, included 10 Semipalmated Sandpipers (*C. pusilla*) from 6 counties, 12 Sanderlings (*C. alba*) in 6 counties, 30 Dunlins (C. alpina) in 9 counties, and 5 Red Phalaropes (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) in 5 counties (Table 1).

Figure 2. Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Santa Cruz Flats, Pinal County, 11 October 2024. Photo by Pierre Deviche

Figure 3. Baird's Sandpiper, San Carlos Lake, Pinal County, 11 November 2024. Photo by James Hoagland

Two Long-tailed/Parasitic Jaegers (*Stercorarius longicaudus/S. parasiticus*) were reported chasing a Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) at San Carlos Lake, Pinal County on 16 September. A Parasitic Jaeger, reported at the same location on 16 October, would be a second record for Pinal County.

Figure 4. Little Gull. Gila River Indian Community, Pinal County, 3 October 2024. Photo by David Pearson

A Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*), photographed in Sacaton on a restricted part of the Gila River Indian Community on 3 October, will be the fourth state record and the first for Pinal County (Figure 4). Four Laughing Gulls (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) were reported, 1 each at Willow Lake, Yavapai County, 1 August; Glendale Recharge Ponds, Maricopa County, 1 to 4 August; San Carlos Lake, Gila County, 17 to 25 August; and Whitewater Draw WA, Cochise County, 16 September. A Short-billed Gull (*Larus brachyrhynchus*), formerly Mew Gull, was at Lake Pleasant, Maricopa County, 21 November. This species was removed from the ABC review list in 2023. A Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) was reported at San Carlos Lake in Gila and Graham counties, 17 August to 27 September. Another was reported at the Glendale Recharge Ponds, 20 September. Reports of this species have increased in the past decade, and the ABC removed it from its review list in January 2025. A Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*), casual in the fall, was at Lake Havasu, Mohave County,

on 1 September. Up to 3 Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) were reported at Lake Havasu, 1 September to 5 October, and 4 were at the Bill Williams River NWR, La Paz County, 1 September. Up to 4 were reported at the east end of San Carlos Lake in Gila and Pinal counties, 16 September to 10 October. One was at Willow Lake in Yavapai County 21 to 22 September, and another was at McCormick Ranch, Maricopa County, 20 to 27 October. A Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*), first reported at Patagonia Lake, Santa Cruz County, on 18 November, continued into the winter season. This loon species is accidental in southeast Arizona. A Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) was at Lake Pleasant in both Yavapai and Maricopa counties, 28 October to 29 November. Surprisingly, only 1 Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) was reported. It was at Tempe Town Lake, Maricopa County, from 24 September into the winter season.

American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*), a rare transient and winter visitor, was reported in 6 counties. Up to 2 were at Whitewater Draw WA, Cochise County, 9 September to 1 October. One each were at Ron Morriss Park, Santa Cruz County on 20 September and possibly the same one on 19 October; Goree's Pond, Pinal County, 10 to 12 October; Dead Horse Ranch, Gila County, 24 October; Base and Meridian WA, Maricopa County, 26 to 29 October; and Christopher Columbus Park, Pima County, 4 November. An adult Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) was reported from Mittry Lake, Yuma County, 2 November. It is the fourth record for the county. Two Tricolored Herons (*Egretta tricolor*) were reported—the first from Wilcox, Cochise County, and the other from Sacaton, Gila River Indian Community, Pinal County, 3 October. A few immature Reddish Egrets (*Egretta rufescens*) wander into Arizona in the fall. One was at a dairy in Stanfield, Pinal County, 21 August. Three more were in Maricopa County—1 each at the Salt River Ponds, 26 August; Lower River Ponds, 7 to 15 September; and Gillespie Dam, 16 November. A White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) reported west of Phoenix in Buckeye, Maricopa County, 14 November, is likely the same one reported farther east at the Tres Rios Wetlands on 8 November. Roseate Spoonbills (*Platalea ajaja*) were reported from 2 counties—1 at Mexican Lake, Navajo County, 18 to 25 August, and a group of 7 in Yuma, 15 September.

Coconino County's first White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*) was reported 11 November from Pasture Canyon. A rare melanistic Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*) was reported at the Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park (EOP), Cochise County from 10 November into the winter season. This is likely the same harrier that wintered at this location last winter. Melanism, which results from an excess of the dark pigment melanin in the feathers, is very rare in birds, and only 4 or 5 reports of this mutation have been previously reported in Northern Harrier (Liguori 2013). No Red-shouldered Hawks (*Buteo lineatus*) were reported away from the Hassayampa River Preserve, Maricopa County, where they are known to nest. Up to 2 Short-tailed Hawks were reported at Mount Lemmon, Pima County from the summer season until 6 September. One dove at doves on a bird feeder in a Sierra Vista yard, Cochise County, on 12 August. Most noteworthy was the first record of this species for Maricopa County. It was reported at Mt. Ord, 13 to 15 August and again at Sycamore Creek on 31 August. One was reported near Barfoot Junction in the Chiricahua Mountains, Cochise County, on 17 August. Remarkably, 2 late Swainson's Hawks were reported in November. One was a flyover near Florence, Pinal County, 4 November, and the other was in farm fields near Yuma, 10 November. This long-distance migrant is casual during the last half of October and accidental in November. The last November report in Arizona was in 2020. Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*), a rare and irregular winter visitant, was reported at 2 locations—Upper Lake Mary, Coconino County, 4 November, and a private home near Portal, Cochise County on 19 November.

Four Elf Owls (*Micrathene whitneyi*) lingered into October. One was at the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, Maricopa County, on 2 October. Three were reported from Cochise County: 1 each from Portal, 1 to 2 October; Whitetail Canyon, Chiricahua Mountains, 5 October; and Chiricahua National Monument (NM), 15 October. More Acorn Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) were reported in lowland parks and yards than is typical in the fall. Five Red-breasted Sapsuckers (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) were reported in 3 counties. A Crested Caracara (*Caracara plancus*), far east of where it is expected in the state, was photographed along Highway 80 in eastern Cochise County near the border with New Mexico on 4 November.

A male Rose-throated Becard (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*) at the Southwest Research Station in the Chiricahua Mountains, Cochise County, 26 September to 8 November, was far from its expected locations farther west. Maricopa County, which had its first record of Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) in 2022 and its second and third records in

Figure 5. Great Crested Flycatcher, Tempe, Maricopa County, 30 September 2024. Photo by Pierre Deviche

Figure 6. Least Flycatcher, Pasture Canyon, Navajo Nation, Coconino County, 7 September. 2024. Photo by Jason Wilder

the fall of 2023 (Jenness 2024, Rosenberg and Core 2024), had a fourth report from Evelyn Hallman Park in Tempe, 27 September to 2 October (Figure 5). There were 3 reports of Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*), an accidental vagrant in Arizona. One was at Pasture Canyon in the Navajo Nation, Coconino County, 7 September (Figure 6), a second was at Base and Meridian WA, Maricopa County 29 October into the winter season, and a third was at Whitetail Canyon, Cochise County, 2 September.

A Blue-headed Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*) was reported in Cottonwood, Yavapai County, 18 September (ABC 2024). Four Philadelphia Vireos (*V. philadelphicus*) were reported, 3 in Cochise County and 1 in Pima County. A Yellow-green Vireo (V. flavoviridis) was reported at Riggs and Price Pond, Maricopa County, 10 October.

Occasionally in the late fall and winter, typically high-elevation Steller's Jays (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) are reported at low elevations in southern Arizona. This fall saw about a dozen reports in Cochise, Santa Cruz, Pima, and Pinal counties. Only 1 Black-capped Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila nigriceps*) was reported. It was at Guadalupe Canyon, Cochise County from 27 August through 10 November. As in 2023, the most southeastern report of LeConte's Thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*) was at the western boundary of the Ironwood NM in Pima County. A pair was reported from 25 October into the winter season. Particularly outstanding was the report of 36 Rufous-backed Robins (*Turdus rufopalliatus*) in 7 counties, the highest number for the fall in the past 18 years. Four Varied Thrushes (*Ixoreus naevius*) were reported from 4 counties (Table 3). The most northern report of an Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) was along the San Pedro River at the San Manuel Crossing, Pinal County, 10 November.

Table 3. Rufous-backed Robin (RBRO) and Varied Thrush (VATH) Numbers, Fall 2007-2024

Year	RBRO No.	VATH 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
2022	4	3
2023	14	8
2024	36	4
Ave.	**10.2**	**5.1**

Source: NAB 2007-2013, eBird 2024

Figure 7. Harris's Sparrow, Portal, Cochise County, 16 November 2024. Photo by Richard Taylor

An Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*), a rare and irregular visitor to the lowlands of southern Arizona, was recorded calling at Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (NCA), Pima County, on 25 September. The western Purple Finch (*Haemorhous purpureus californicus*) is a casual transient and winter visitor. One was reported at Madera Canyon, Pima County, on 2 November. Six Lapland Longspurs (*Calcarius lapponicus*) were reported from 5 counties. The reports included Rousseau Sod Farm, Maricopa County, 12 October; San Carlos Lake, Gila County, 16 October; Avra Valley Wastewater Treatment Plant, Pima County, 11 November into December; Las Cienegas NCA, Santa Cruz County, 14 November into December; Ajo, Pima County, 24 November; and Babbitt Tank, Coconino County, 26 November. Five Fox Sparrows (*Passerella iliaca*) from the northern Red group (*iliaca*) were reported: Tucson, Pima County, 29 October; Paton Center for Hummingbirds, Santa Cruz County, 7 November into December; Whitetail Canyon, Chiricahua Mountains, Cochise County, 21 November into December; and 2 private residences in Portal, Cochise County, both on 24 November into December. The only Fox Sparrow reported from the Sooty (*unalaschcensis*) group, rare in Arizona, was at a private residence in Portal, Cochise County, 26 October. Also in Portal, a Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) was reported on 16 November (Figure 7). A report of Nelson's Sparrow (*Ammospiza nelsoni*) from Randy's Rock Camp in the Grand Canyon, Coconino County, 12 to 13 September, is only the second for Arizona.

A lingering Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) was at Wes Miller Park in the east Tucson area, Pima County, at the late date of 6 November. There have been only 6 November reports in the previous 10 years. A Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) reported at San Bernardino NWR, Cochise County on 6 October was a casual transient and is being reviewed by the ABC. The Bobolink was regular during the 1970s into the early 1990s and was not on the ABC review list much of that time. It was returned to the review list in 2005 (Rosenberg et al. 2011, 2017). Five Orchard Orioles (*Icterus spurius*) were reported: Whitetail Canyon, Cochise County, 20 August; Higley and Ocotillo Ponds, Maricopa County, 21 August; Sweetwater Wetlands, Tucson, Pima County, 30 August; Whitewater Draw WA, Cochise County, 31 August; and Flagstaff, Coconino County, 27 September. A Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*), a casual transient and winter visitor, was reported at El Rio Open Space Preserve, Marana, Pima County, 26 November into December. Three Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) were at Walnut Canyon Lakes, Coconino County, 22 to 24 September; near Florence, Pinal County, 4 to 6 November; and Whitetail Canyon, 16 November. The Pinal County report is a first for the county. This rare (in Arizona) species was removed from the ABC's review list in 2021.

During the fall, 40 wood warbler species were reported, the highest number in the past 18 years. The 18-year average is 33.4. One Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) was reported at Chandler, Maricopa County, on 20 October. Seven Louisiana Waterthrushes (*Parkesia motacilla*) were reported. Three were in Santa Cruz County: Patagonia Roadside, 11 August; Harshaw Creek Road, 11 September; and Blue Haven Road in Patagonia, 13 November. In Cochise County 2 were reported: Whitewater Draw, 4 October, and San Pedro Riparian NCA, 22 November into December. The remaining 2 were at Madera Canyon, Pima County, 21 September into December, and Page Springs NM, Yavapai County, 20 October to 30 November. A male Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) was photographed at Pipe Spring NM, Mohave County, 18 September. Four Prothonotary Warblers (*Protonotaria citrea*) were reported. They were at Gilbert Water Ranch, Maricopa County, 10 September; Howard Well, Graham County, 12 September; Portal, 10 September; and Dragoon Mountain Ranch, Cochise County, 22 to 30 October. The Kentucky Warbler (*Geothlypis formosa*) reported at a residence near Maricopa on 25 September is the fourth record for Pinal County.

Two Cape May Warblers (*Setophaga tigrina*) were reported: Wenima WA, Apache County, 13 October and San Pedro Riparian NCA, Cochise County, 25 November. Four reports of Bay-breasted Warbler (*S. castanea*) were from Base and Meridian WA, Maricopa County, 20 to 25 October; Willow Creek Reservoir, Yavapai County, 21 October; Hereford,

Cochise County, 24 October; and Flagstaff, Coconino County, 6 to 10 November. Outstanding were 7 reports of Blackburnian Warblers (*S. fusca*), an 18-year high for the fall season. They included Pasture Canyon, Coconino County, 7 September; Kachina Village near Flagstaff, Coconino County, 26 September (pers. comm. J. Wilder); Sun City, Maricopa County, 5 October; Verde River, Maricopa County, 8 October (Figure 8); Base and Meridian WA, Maricopa County, 10 October; Gilbert Water Ranch, Maricopa County, 29 October to 3 November; Sabino Dam, Pima County, 27 November into December. This species was removed from the ABC's review list in 2022. Two Palm Warblers (*S. palmarum*) were reported from Maricopa County: Glendale Recharge Ponds, 16 October into the winter, and Scottsdale Rock Park, 18 to19 October. Yellow-throated Warblers (*S. dominica*) were reported from Sierra Vista EOP, Cochise County, 22 September and Papago Park, Maricopa County, 8 to 17 October. A Black-throated Green Warbler (*S. virens*) was at Havasu NWR, Mohave County, 12 October. Rufous-capped Warblers (*Basileuterus rufifrons*) were reported from 3 locations, up to 2 at locations in Santa Cruz County: Ramanote Canyon, 2 to 23 August, and Sycamore Canyon, 17 August to 11 November. An individual at Florida Canyon in the Santa Rita Mountains, Pima County, first reported on 24 August, lingered into December. A Canada Warbler (*Cardellina canadensis*) was observed at the Yuma Wetlands, 2 November. Another report was from Paloma Ranch, west of Phoenix, Maricopa County, 10 September.

Figure 8. Blackburnian Warbler, Verde River, Maricopa County, 8 October 2024. Photo by Troy Corman

Seven Scarlet Tanagers (*Piranga olivacea*) were reported—a 15-year high for the fall season. They included 1 each at a private residence near Maricopa, Pinal County, 9 October; Whitetail Canyon, Cochise County, 14 October; Nogales, Santa Cruz County, 21 October; Desert Botanical Garden, Maricopa County, 23 October; Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Pinal County, 30 October to 4 November; Tucson, Pima County, 30 to 31 October; and Hassayampa River Preserve, Maricopa County, 2 to 3 November. The Pinal County sightings were fourth and fifth records for the county. Up to 2 nesting Flame-colored Tanagers (*Piranga bidentata*) in Miller Canyon in the Huachuca Mountains, Cochise County, continued from the summer into August, with 1 lingering until 25 September.

Yellow Grosbeak (*Pheucticus chrysopeplus*), a rare visitor from Mexico, is most often reported in Arizona in May and June. However, since 2021, there have been 4 fall reports. Reports from Yavapai County (26 October 2021) and Maricopa County (6 October 2022) have been accepted by the ABC (Rosenberg and Core 2024). Two reports in the fall of 2024 included 1 from Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Pinal County, 12 to 17 October (Figure 9), and another from Wilcox, Cochise County, 4 November (ABC 2024). The Boyce Thompson sighting is the first for Pinal County, and the Wilcox report is the first November sighting for the state.

Figure 9. Yellow Grosbeak, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Pinal County, 14 October 2024. Photo by Robert Bowker

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