

SPECIES OF THE MONTH**STREAK-BACKED ORIOLE**

MAY 2025

The Streak-backed Oriole (*Icterus pustulatus*), first reported in Arizona in 1975, is a casual visitor to the state. It has been reported in Mohave, Santa Cruz, and Cochise counties and is known to have nested in 3 others—Pinal, Pima, and Maricopa. In 1993, during surveys for the *Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas* (2005) a pair was discovered nesting along the lower San Pedro River near Dudleyville, Pinal County. Up to 2 pairs continued nesting in that area until 2000. In 1994, a pair nested at a pecan grove near the Pinal Air Park in Pima County. In 2020 an attempted nesting at the Hassayampa River Preserve in Maricopa County failed when the nest was parasitized by a Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*). A male Streaked-backed Oriole was never seen around the nest, and the female may have bred with another oriole species. Streak-backed Oriole was removed from the Arizona Bird Committee's review list in 2018.



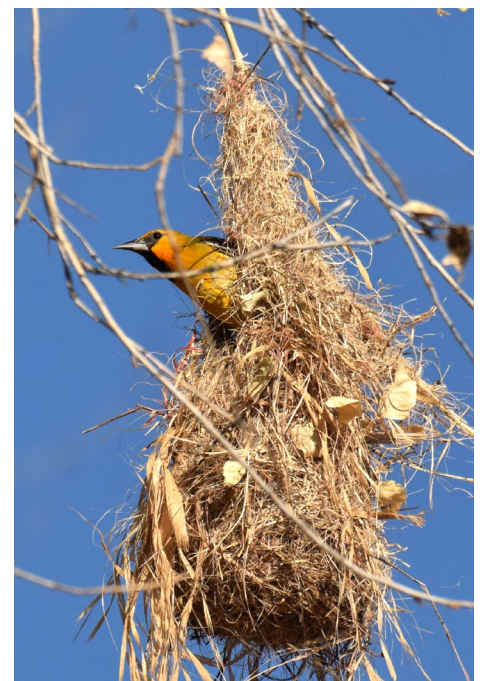
Male, Patagonia, Santa Cruz County, 11 June 2011. Photo by Alan Schmierer

The Streak-backed Oriole's range extends from northern Sonora south to Costa Rica, mostly along the Pacific slope. The species is mostly resident but migrates in the northern part of its breeding range. Little is known about its migration, but apparently some birds wander north after nesting as many Arizona records are in the winter.

In Arizona, male Streaked-backed Orioles have often been mistaken for Hooded Orioles (*I. cucullatus*), which is a common nesting species throughout much of the state. Much of the plumage is similar. The head and chest on the Streak-backed Oriole, however, are a richer orange. In fact, it was once called Scarlet-headed Oriole. The Streak-backed Oriole has a black lore, and its chin is black to the breast, whereas Hooded Oriole also has a black face. One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the Streak-backed Oriole is the black streaks on the mantle and back. It is also whiter on the wings. Both species have black tails. Neither has black on the top of the head like Bullock's Oriole (*I. bullockii*).

The female Streak-backed and Hooded Orioles are very different. The former is similar to the male, but more yellowish and less orange-colored. The black around the face and chin is similar, and it has dark streaking on the mantle and back. The female Hooded Oriole, however, is drab compared to the male. It is overall pale yellow with no black around the chin and face. Its white wing bars are also paler.

The Streak-backed Oriole's nest, like those of many other orioles, is a pensile bag. Made from plant fibers and fungal rhizomorphs, it tends to be coarser and less tightly woven than those of some other orioles.



Streak-backed Oriole (female), Hassayampa River Preserve, Maricopa County, 27 June 2020. Photo by Ryan P. O'Donnell