

**SPECIES OF THE MONTH****LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH****JANUARY 2026**

One of Arizona's most enigmatic birds is the Lawrence's Goldfinch (*Spinus lawrencei*). Some winters this species irrupts into Arizona, New Mexico, northern Mexico, and even western Texas; yet in other winters, it is virtually absent from those areas. It primarily breeds in arid woodlands in the foothills of California and northern Baja California, usually near water. Even there its behavior is more erratic than other goldfinches, as it shows little fidelity to previous breeding locations. One summer a California valley may be filled with nesting Lawrence's Goldfinches, and the next year there are none.

In Arizona, this species normally occurs annually between October and April in varying numbers, with individuals occasionally arriving as early as late August and lingering into May. However, it has been reported in every month and in all 15 counties, with the most reports and highest numbers in the southeastern part of the state. In irruption years, its distribution is much wider, and large groups may be seen. In March 2007, for example, up to 400 were reported 1 day at Catalina State Park in Pima County.



Lawrence's Goldfinch, Sun Valley, Maricopa County, 27 October 2025. Photo by Ronnie Reed, Macaulay Library at Cornell Lab (ML644253895)

Lawrence's Goldfinch also breeds locally and irregularly in Arizona. The first known record was near Parker in La Paz County in 1952. It has nested at several locations in Maricopa County, most notably at the Hassayampa River Preserve where it was first reported in 1980. Since 2005, it has nested nearly every year there. Nesting in other counties include Gila at Gisela in 2003, Pinal at Boyce Thompson Arboretum in 2005, and probable nesting in Yuma at Betty's Kitchen (near Laguna Dam) in 2005. Why Lawrence's Goldfinch nests sporadically in Arizona is unclear. Its nesting does not seem connected to large population influxes since previous nesting records did not follow noteworthy winter population incursions. There may be an association between cool, wet springs and subsequent abundant growth of annuals in southern and central Arizona, and the local nesting of Lawrence's Goldfinches in the state. It feeds mainly on seeds (occasionally also buds) of annual plants in various phases of ripening, as well as berries such as mistletoe (*Phoradendron* spp.). It is especially fond of amaranth (*Amaranthus* spp.) seeds. It requires free water to process seeds and maintain water balance.