

Arizona Sonoran Desert Birds in Decline

A State of the Birds Report



Our most common and beloved desert birds are experiencing serious population declines. Sonoran Audubon Society members have examined forty years of information collected on Christmas Bird Counts and on nesting bird surveys. This review was very alarming. To focus attention on declining bird populations, we have selected ten birds that live in the Sonoran desert and in key water habitats in our area. Our *Ten Bird Species in Decline* showcases the need to protect local habitat for birds and wildlife. Working together or simply landscaping in bird-friendly ways, we can slow these birds population declines so that they will be around for us and future generations of Arizonans to enjoy. Visit <http://sonoranaudubon.org> for detailed information about how you can help

COMMON BIRDS that NEED YOUR HELP

Percent Decline
In ARIZONA Since
1967



CACTUS WREN (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*)

Our State Bird! The Cactus Wren does best in native desert. You can help keep Cactus Wrens in your community by planting native cactus and trees and limit grassy lawns and irrigation.

49%



BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*)

These wonderfully photogenic birds are mostly found in agricultural areas and in creosote/saltbush desert. Sometimes they find the desert around airports inviting too. Development that destroys native desert is the greatest threat to the species. Sonoran Audubon Society is a partner with Wild at Heart, an Arizona conservation organization that re-locates these owls when they are threatened by development.

Unknown



BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*)

A beautiful desert bird with a pleasant tinkling bell song, the Black-throated Sparrow has retreated to desert parks and desert remnants in the Valley of the Sun. Development and sprawl continue to contribute to this species decline.

69%



VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*)

Habitat loss and urbanization, again, are major threats to this tiny desert bird with the striking yellow head and very loud call. Verdins feed on insects and nectar and, with sufficient native desert landscaping, will visit and nest in our backyards.

65%



PHAINOPEPLA (*Phainopepla nitens*)

Pronounced "Fane oh PEP la," the black cardinal has a very prominent crest. It prefers areas of desert and washes where native trees host mistletoe. They eat the berries and nest in the dense mistletoe. Phainopepla are not found in agricultural or open, treeless areas.

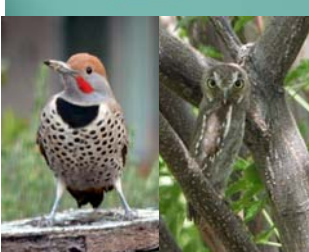
64%



COSTAS HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte costae*)

Flashing a purple throat aggressively around its favorite flowering bush, this very small "hummer" needs safe habitats in our yards and parks. They will come to feeders with 4 parts water/1 part sugar formula. Costas hummers successfully co-exist with their cousins, Annas Hummingbirds, in older desert-landscaped neighborhoods and undisturbed desert.

73%



GILDED FLICKER (*Colaptes chrysoides*) and ELF OWL (*Micrathene whitneyi*)

The Gilded Flicker, an unusual Southwestern woodpecker, lives in holes it drills in saguaro cacti. The Elf Owl migrates to our area from Mexico for the summer nesting season. It nests in the flickers holes! As the Sonoran desert disappears, these two species continue to decline. To slow this trend, saguaro cactus need to be planted generously in developments and native Sonoran desert left undisturbed. Both birds are on the National Audubon Societys Watch List as species of concern, so we should be noting and counting these birds when we see them in our yards and on our outings.

71%

RARE RIPARIAN AND WETLAND BIRDS



YUMA CLAPPER RAIL (*Rallus longirostris yumanensis*)

“Riparian” means “river habitat.” This very secretive rail requires healthy marshland and minimal disturbance to its nests. The Gila River supports this bird because it flows and has a mixed reed and cattail habitat. If you see this rail, you have seen a special bird!



WESTERN YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus americanus occidentalis*)

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo arrives to nest when summer monsoon rains begin. A relative of our road-runner, the Yellow-billed Cuckoo breeds in cottonwood thickets and willow forests along rivers. Proper management of livestock and maintenance of water flow in our streams keep habitat healthy for this threatened nester.



CENTRAL ARIZONA HABITATS AT RISK

The Sonoran desert and associated grasslands, wetlands, lakes and rivers host some of the highest diversity of breeding birds in the continental United States.

Meanwhile, some bird populations are declining due to building and agricultural development in the Sonoran desert and open grasslands. Two of the featured species depend upon marshlands or riparian habitats. Recent projects to restore and protect the value of these ecological systems are encouraging.



WHAT SONORAN AUDUBON SOCIETY IS DOING

Arizonans care deeply about birds and their habitats. Sonoran Audubon Society is monitoring bird populations and promoting sound stewardship at home and in wild places. Our Important Bird Areas program identifies critical bird habitats. Our partners including the Arizona Game and Fish Department and land owners and managers work hard at promoting the conservation of these areas. The Important Bird Areas program provides landowners with advice and assistance on how to manage their lands in bird friendly ways.



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PRESERVE BIRD

Preserve habitat and cacti for Sonoran desert bird nesting sites. Become knowledgeable about which landscape plants are invaders (for example, fountain grasses, buffelgrass and African sumac) and avoid using them.

Advocate for sufficient open lands to remain undeveloped to support not only Sonoran desert and grasslands birds, but larger animals such as pronghorn antelope. Support the efforts of local land trusts and open space initiatives sponsored by your county or community.

Become water wise in your home and at work. Help Arizona conserve and wisely use water resources, including rivers, streams and riparian habitats.

Be energy wise in your daily life and support initiatives and laws that address global climate change.

Participate in the Christmas Bird Count, the Great Backyard Bird Count and enter bird observations into eBird. All important ways to help ornithologists track bird populations.

Visit <http://sonoranaudubon.org> for more information. SAS meets at 7 PM every 2nd Wednesday, September through May, at the Glendale Library - Just show up!

Photo Credits: Cactus Wren and Burrowing Owl - **Shirley Rasmale**; Black-throated Sparrow and Gilded Flicker-**George Wall**; Verdin- **Vera Markham**; Phainopepla- **Dave Bixler**; Costas Hummingbird- **Tresa Lematta**; Elf Owl- **Julie Stromberg-Matt Chew**; Yuma Clapper Rail- Rick & Nora Bowers; Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo Wikipedia
Photographer names in BOLD are Sonoran Audubon Society