

Field Trip Report: Sonoran Audubon Society trip along Bush Highway in the Tonto National Forest



On Thursday, March 7th, a group of thirteen people gathered and headed to the Tonto National Forest and birded the state parks along Bush Highway east of Fountain Hills. We stopped at four recreational areas: Butcher Jones, Saguaro del Norte (Saguaro Lake), Coon Bluff, and Granite Reef. Saguaro Lake is the result of a dam on the Salt River and the last two of these sites are on the river. It was a perfect day for birding, temperatures in the low seventies and partly overcast skies. Some desert flowers were in bloom but the poppies were unopened in the early morning.

Our first stop was at Butcher Jones where we began by scoping the waterbirds that included a few species of ducks, grebes, and others. Western Grebes were numerous but distant. A walk through the open forests around the parking lots gave us our highest number of passerine species for the day and included Cassin's Vireo, a pair of Black-tailed Gnatcatchers, Brown Creeper and many others. At Saguaro Lake, there were also many of the same waterfowl but we added American Wigeon and Common Mergansers. Most of the waterfowl were distant near the dam and there were many swallows at the dam bridge structure but they were too far to identify. Highlight birds were a Prairie Falcon soaring on the cliff face and photographed by Dave Kennedy, and also a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. A pair of Vermillion Flycatchers entertained us

during our lunch at Coon Bluff. After lunch, we birded a trail along the edge of the Salt River and the trails through the mesquites. We had good views of Wilson's Snipe and Greater Yellowlegs on the river. The woodland walk yielded Gray Flycatcher and a number of Ruby-crowned Kinglet but also a Hutton's Vireo for comparisons. Our last stop was at Granite Reef where we had two immature Bald Eagles soaring overhead and a Sora returning calls from the reeds. The trip ended at 2:00 pm and we had a trip list of 56 species, only three of these species were heard only.

Birders:

Dave and Ruth Kennedy, Dan Bohlmann, Cindy Rucker, Jean Eddins, Bob Cirillo, Sheri Laude, Carol Sharplin, Jim Consolley, David Charles, Tom Locascio, Dominic Sherony, and Donna Smith.

Species Seen:

Listed in the table below are the highest numbers of any species at one of the four locations.

Species Name	High Count	Species Name	High Count
Gadwall	1	Black Phoebe	3
American Wigeon	15	Vermilion Flycatcher	2
Ring-necked Duck	1	Hutton's Vireo	1
Lesser Scaup	20	Cassin's Vireo	1
Bufflehead	1	Common Raven	1
Common Merganser	3	N. Rough-winged Swallow	2
Ruddy Duck	18	Verdin	3
Gambel's Quail	1	Brown Creeper	1
Pied-billed Grebe	1	Rock Wren	1
Eared Grebe	12	Cactus Wren	1
Western Grebe	100	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	1
Mourning Dove	1	Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	2
Sora	1	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	2
American Coot	100	American Robin	2
Wilson's Snipe	1	Curve-billed Thrasher	1

Greater Yellowlegs	2	European Starling	1
Ring-billed Gull	10	Phainopepla	5
Neotropic Cormorant	12	House Finch	1
Turkey Vulture	1	Lesser Goldfinch	3
Bald Eagle	2	White-crowned Sparrow	6
Harris's Hawk	2	Song Sparrow	4
Red-tailed Hawk	1	Lincoln's Sparrow	1
Belted Kingfisher	1	Abert's Towhee	2
Gila Woodpecker	1	Red-winged Blackbird	15
Ladder-backed Woodp.	1	Great-tailed Grackle	30
Northern Flicker	1	Yellow-rumped Warbler	20
Prairie Falcon (photo)	1	Northern Cardinal	6
Gray Flycatcher	1	House Sparrow	10