Beginning Birding Along the Lower Salt and Gila Rivers – a Covid-Safe Activity

THANK YOU FOR JOINING THE WEBINAR – WE WILL BEGIN SHORTLY!

(ALL PARTICIPANTS WILL BE MUTED. PLEASE ENTER QUESTIONS/COMMENTS IN THE CHAT BOX)
Tonight’s Agenda:

• Why Birds?
• Birding Equipment
• Safety
• Bird Identification
  • Tips for Finding Birds
  • Basic Bird ID
  • Common AZ Birds
  • Tricky ID Challenges
• Places to go on the Lower Salt/Gila Rivers

Tonight’s Presenters:

• Bob McCormick
  • Sonoran Audubon Society
    Former President
  • Important Bird Area Coordinator

• Steven Prager
  • Audubon Southwest
    Outreach Biologist
  • Chapter Liaison
    (AZ/NM)
Why Birds?
Bald Eagle. Photo: Mick Thompson.

Summer Tanager. Photo: Megumi Aita.

Abert’s Towhee. Photo: Mick Thompson.
Climate Watch

Audubon’s Climate Watch is a new community science program that explores how North American birds are responding to climate change. In 2014, Audubon released the Audubon Birds and Climate Change Report highlighting the risks that climate change poses to birds across North America. In response, thousands of people asked how they could help make the world a better place for birds. Now, you can help by observing birds in your area, using a specific protocol, to help us learn about how birds are responding to the changing climate.
If you take care of the birds, you take care of most of the big problems in the world.

-Dr. Thomas Lovejoy, George Mason University
Tools of the Trade

- Clothing
- Optics
- Field Notes
- Field Guides
- Apps
- Checklists
Clothing

What you want to wear depends on where/when you’re birding, but there are a few things to always consider...

• Colors (avoid them)
• Comfort/ease of motion
• Weather
• Terrain
• Layers
• Hat
Optics

• **Binoculars**
  - 8x42 is good for beginners, but higher magnification can be useful
  - Can range from $30 to $2,000, but the $240-$450 range is good
  - Rule of thumb: by the best binoculars you can afford
  - Look for waterproofed, nitrogen-purged, multi-coated glass

• **Scope**
  - More expensive
  - Uses: Viewing stationary objects like feeders, distant birds on bodies of water, observing birds with a group *(Not the best option during Covid!)*
The Camera

Not how your camera works but rather how to work your camera
What should I get?

- It doesn’t really matter what camera you buy.
- Small cameras will take decent pictures but if you want real good photos, you will need a real good camera.
- All good cameras are going to be bulky and get in the way of your binoculars. There is no way around it. You will have to carry both.
- Cannon 80D w/ 75-300mm lens is a popular set-up. They runs about $900.
- The longer the lense, the less need for getting close. Use a UV filter, they are cheap and keep the lense from dirt and damage. Use a hood. Fast shutter speeds limit bright light, stop the action, and get you more photos.
Close-ups!

- A lens that can focus to 8' is great for taking close-ups – you could use a smaller lens but they have a wider field of view.
To get good photos you need to think it thru. There are several steps you should follow. First, you want to be between the sun and your subject. Second, study your subject, what is it doing, can I take advantage. Can I sneak up on it? Lastly, think about a set-up.
The stalk

- Stalking a bird is hard. Some tips to get close…move a short distance and stop, take a photo. If the bird is ok with you, do it again…and then again. Use cover. Try talking to the bird. Silly but it works. Who’s a good bird…
Set-up 1 – Morning at the pond.

- The Golden hour – the hour right after sunrise and the hour before sunset. Morning is best with clear clean light. Sunset photos can be more artistic as the light can have a reddish hue altering the colors of your subject.
Set-up 2 – Watching a feeding location.

- Anywhere birds feed – Sunflowers, nectar, feeders, etc. Take some time and watch your subject as you photograph. Does it comeback to the same perch? Does it frequent a certain spot or bush?
Set-up 3 – Nest or territorial location.

- Nesting birds are great subjects to photograph... if you stay at a safe distance. You will know when you are at a safe distance as the bird continues to act normal and ignores you completely.
Set-up 4 - Stake out a water hole.

- The desert has little water so any water hole will have birds constantly coming and going. Practice your skills by getting close to these.
Setup 5 – take advantage of human activity

- Birds take advantage of human activity. From farm fields to french fries, observe and take advantage.
Set-up 6 – Special locations

- Certain locations attract birds. Use the tools at hand and watch what happens. Example …Paige Springs Fish Hatchery…
Field Guides

Many to choose from, but good ones include...

- Species drawings or photographs
- Species descriptions
- Range maps
- Natural history information

And they are organized by...

- Taxonomy/groups of like birds
- Ducks, Hawks, Woodpeckers, Warblers, Finches, etc.
- NOT color
Apps

- **Field Guides:**
  - Sibley eGuide to the Birds of North America
  - Audubon Bird Guide (FREE)
  - iBird

- **Active Identification Apps:**
  - Merlin Bird ID
  - Birdsnap
  - BirdSongUSA: USA Automatic
Checklists give you an idea of what you may encounter before you go birding, giving you the chance to study

sonoranaudubon.org/projects/birding-checklists/

- eBird Checklists
- Game & Fish Departments
- Forest Service Ranger Stations
- State and National Parks
- Local/City Parks
- Arboretums
Safety

There are many risks to consider when birding. Here are some tips.

• Know the hazards, both natural and human.
  • Natural: weather, terrain, wildlife, plant life
  • Human: private land/landowners. Unexpected encounters
• Don’t get lost or stranded.
  • Bring a map/GPS
  • Tell someone where you’re going. Bring a phone.
• Bring a buddy.
  • Birding in (physically distanced) pairs can increase safety
Safety

Covid 19

• Check conditions
  • https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/infectious-disease-epidemiology/covid-19/dashboards/

• Wear your mask

• Maintain distance of 6+ feet

• Carpool only within your family or pod

• Comply with state/municipal guidelines
Safety

Some people face hazards that others do not

- Birding While Black

- Birding as a woman

Access

- Birdability
  - focuses on removing barriers to access for birders with mobility and other challenges
  - [https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/819bf15a20164b4ba5196c04f58836b4](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/819bf15a20164b4ba5196c04f58836b4)
Tips for Finding Birds

• Using your senses
• Timing
• Approach
• Weather
• Habitat
• Group Size
• Common Birds
Common Birds of Arizona

We will look at some common birds that you can encounter while you are out and about in Arizona.

As we progress, we will look at some comparisons between similar species and discuss how to tell them apart.
If you can’t tell, it’s a Northern Flicker
Woodpeckers

Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers
Egrets

Black beak, yellow feet – vs - Yellow beak black feet

Snowy Egret  Great Egret

Cattle Egrets are much smaller
Teal

Green-winged, Blue-winged & Cinnamon
Blackbirds

Brewers, Red-winged, and Yellow-headed. Males above, females below.
Here are some birds that are at almost everyone’s house. What features do you see that lead to the identification. Of course the males are easy identify.
Sparrows – Rusty Capped

Details, details, details... similar but there are differences

- Field Sparrow
- Chipping Sparrow
- Rufous-crowned Sparrow
- Song Sparrow
Sparrows - Streaky

Where you are can determine what you are looking at.

Savannah Sparrow

Vesper Sparrow

Lincoln's Sparrow
Warblers are everyone’s favorite. There are many varieties and they all have one thing in common…

They won’t sit still.

Females are hard to identify!
Hummingbirds

Black-chinned are riparian!
Females as usual are tough to identify. In fact all the photos of Black-chinned females on the CornellLab website are listed as Female/immature male.
Females – Dark birds

More Female trouble…
Above, a Brewer’s Black Bird.
Above Right, a Great-tailed Grackle. To Right, a Brown-headed Cowbird
Vireos are typically summer birds. Look at the facial features.

Above, A Cassin’s. Top Right a Hutton’s. Lower Right a Warbling Vireo.
Can you believe these get confused?

Above, Verdin. Top Right, a Lucy’s Warbler. Lower Right, a Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher.
Bird ID Tips

• Narrowing it down

Identifying birds is a game of process of elimination. By categorizing a bird broadly and working your way to specifics, you can usually ID a bird to species.

1) Range/Season
2) Habitat
3) Group
4) Species
Bird ID Tips Cont.

1) Range/Season

- Helps you narrow things down to the birds likely to be in your area at a given time
- Birds can be out of range
Bird ID Tips Cont.

2) Habitat

- Within a given geographic range, what sort of habitat is the bird using? (Riparian, Desert, Chaparral, Pinyon-Juniper, etc.)?
- Within that habitat type, what plant community is the species using?
Bird ID Tips Cont.

3) Group
   - Silhouette/Structure
   - Color
   - Flight Pattern
   - Behavior
   - Habitat
Bird ID Tips Cont.

3) Group
- Silhouette/Structure
  - Bill shape
  - Body Shape
  - Wing Shape
  - Tail
  - Posture
  - Size
Bird ID Tips Cont.

3) Group
• Silhouette/Structure
  • **Bill shape:** Different bill shapes evolved depending upon their function and the food source they’re designed for
  • Body Shape
  • Wing Shape
  • Tail
  • Posture
  • Size
Bird ID Tips Cont.

3) **Group**
   - Silhouette/Structure
     - Bill shape
     - **Body Shape**: Round? Oval? Slender? Stocky?
     - **Wing Shape**: Pointed? Crooked? Narrow? Rounded? Stout?
   - Posture
   - Size

Mesquite Bosque. Photo: Steve Prager
Bird ID Tips Cont.

3) Group
   • Silhouette/Structure
     • Bill shape
     • Body Shape
     • Wing Shape
     • Tail
     • Posture: Vertical? Horizontal? Angled? Hunched?
   • Size: Comparison in size to known objects/birds is best. Can be tricky, and perspective matters!
**Bird ID Tips Cont.**

3) **Group**

- Color: Can be helpful, but misleading!
  - Be careful of backlighting and similar effects!
  - Use overall color to help narrow to group
  - Do not use this as your only tool

- **Blue: Jays, Bluebirds**
  - ![Birds](image)

- **Yellow: Orioles, Warblers**
  - ![Birds](image)

- **Black: Corvids and Blackbirds**
  - ![Birds](image)

- **Brown: Sparrows and Finches**
  - ![Birds](image)
3) **Group**

- **Flight Pattern**
  - Direct flight (shorebirds, blackbirds)
  - Flap and glide (ravens, falcons)
  - Glide (Swifts, swallows)
  - Hawking (flycatchers, warblers)
  - Hovering (hummingbirds, kestrels)
  - Static Soaring (hawks, vultures)
  - Straight line formation (pelicans, cormorants)
  - Undulating (woodpeckers, finches)
  - V formation (ducks, geese)
  - Zig-zag (snipes, grouse)
Bird ID Tips Cont.

3) **Group**

- **Behavior**: What is the bird doing?
  - Flycatchers pump their tails
  - Towhees eat seeds of the ground, warblers pick insects off leaves
  - Woodpeckers climb up trunks, nuthatches climb down

- **Habitat**: Where is the bird?
  - In a tree?
  - In a shrub?
  - On the ground?
  - In water?
Bird ID Tips Cont.

4) **Species**

- **Color:** More specific than when thinking about group
- Field Marks
- Song/Call
Bird ID Tips Cont.

4) **Species**
   - Color
   - Relative Size
   - **Field Marks:** Specific details about the color, pattern, and structure of the bird that reliably identify it as unique from other species.
   - Song/Call
Bird ID Tips Cont.

4) **Species**
   - Color
   - Relative Size
   - Field Marks
   - **Song/Call:** All birds have calls and/or songs that are unique to the species and can be used to identify it.
BIRDING THE LOWER SALT AND GILA RIVERS

A COVID SAFE ACTIVITY
E-BIRD MAP OF THE HOTSPOTS

# of Species

- 300-400
- 250-300
- 200-250
- 150-200
- 100-150
- 50-100
THE IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS (IBA)
ARLINGTON WILDLIFE AREA - 213 SPECIES
ARLINGTON PONDS
ROBBIN’S BUTTE WILDLIFE AREA - 150 SPECIES
ROBBIN’S BUTTE CENSUS – RIVER OVERLOOK
ROBBIN’S BUTTE
JACKIE MECK’S LAKE AT ESTRELLA PARK – 207 SPECIES
BASELINE & MERIDIAN WILDLIFE AREA – 251 SPECIES
THE BIRDS OF B&M - IBIS
THE BIRDS OF B&M
THE BIRDS OF B&M - SWALLOWS
TRES RIOS WETLANDS – 262 SPECIES!

It’s Free!

Tres Rios Wetlands Access Permit Request

To obtain a free access permit to the Tres Rios Overbank Wetlands, please fill out the form below. Only one permit is needed per group, but requestor must be present when visiting the site.

https://www.phoenix.gov/waterservices/tresrios/permit *denotes required field

First Name*

Last Name*

Requested Permit Start Date *(Permits are valid for six months.)*

Phone Number

Email Address*

Mailing Address

City

State: Arizona

Country *(If other than United States.)*

ZIP/Postal Code

Before you submit this e-mail form, we would like you to be aware of the city’s policy on the use of its e-mail systems. The policy states that the e-mail message you are about to send: (1) is subject to public disclosure under the Public Records Law, (2) is not private or confidential and (3) is retained for 90 days.

Continue
FRIENDSHIP PARK – 111 SPECIES
CRYSTAL GARDENS – 83 SPECIES
BIRDS OF CRYSTAL GARDENS
GLENDALE RECHARGE PONDS – 292 SPECIES!
BIRDS OF THE RECHARGE PONDS
WHAT TO LOOK FORWARD TO WHEN COVID-19 IS OVER

- Field Trips
- Tres Rios Earth and Nature Festival
- Bird Surveys – IBA, Water bird, Yellow-billed Cuckoo
- Christmas Bird Counts
- Birds and Beer at Rio Salado
- Don’t forget to get your FREE Arizona State bird list on our website
  WWW.SONORANAUDUBON.ORG
THANKS FOR WATCHING!

Check our website for up-coming presentations and in a few short months, we will resume field trips.

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