

Wickenburg—February 2, 2020

By Eric Hough

The most well-known birding in Wickenburg is the Hassayampa River Preserve, but many don't know that there are several other productive and interesting birding locations within the town of Wickenburg itself. For this morning, 15 birders joined me to check out a few sites to see what resident and wintering birds were present. Our first two stops were at parks in town, the small Boetto Park with a grove of old mesquites and Coffinger Park with fields, trees, and adjacent vegetated residential streets. As we gathered at Boetto Park we were met with a brilliant male Vermilion Flycatcher singing from a perch as it warmed in the early sunrise light. Cooper's Hawks were seen at both parks and Coffinger also had an immature Ferruginous Hawk perched on one of the ballfield light poles. Other highlights included a few American Robins, Lark Sparrows, and Northern Cardinals. Dozens of White-crowned Sparrows foraged in the shrubs and in the fruiting pyracanthas.



We then went over to the Kerkes Trailhead, a brand new access point for the Hassayampa River bed and riparian vegetation in Wickenburg. This is a good option for those visiting the area on Mondays or Tuesdays when the Hassayampa River Preserve is closed. There are also short trails onto the adjacent Pulte property, a parcel owned by The Nature Conservancy and comanaged by the Wickenburg Conservation Foundation. There is currently a small amphitheater, some interpretive signs, and small decorative bird feeders used by the nearby Hassayampa Elementary

School for outdoor education, but birders are welcome here. There is a “no trespassing” sign on the gate at the south end of the parking lot, but this is meant to keep vehicular traffic out (*vide* Wickenburg Conservation Foundation).



Here we had good raptor diversity as the thermals rose by late morning, with a pair of Black Vultures, over a dozen Turkey Vultures, a heard-only Red-shouldered Hawk, three Red-tailed Hawks (including one dark morph bird), and a Ferruginous Hawk. We also had a Greater Roadrunner, several Killdeer, Vermilion Flycatchers, Phainopeplas, Lark Sparrows, and a few Pine Siskins foraging with Lesser Goldfinches on the cottonwood catkins (flower clusters). We had forgotten to do a group photo before folks started taking off, but we did a photo with those that still remained:



As an optional trip for those that had additional time to stay in the area, five of us went over to Wickenburg's "Secret Ponds", two large excavated basins in the Hassayampa River bed north of Hwy. 60. The ponds still had water and were attracting waterfowl, including Mallards, Gadwalls, American Wigeons, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, and Ring-necked Ducks. Other wintering species included Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers, while residents included Greater Roadrunners, Black and Say's Phoebes, Vermilion Flycatchers, and Abert's Towhees.

If you would like to see the full species lists for each site, you can visit the eBird links below. All of these sites are also eBird Hotspots, so you can view past sightings at each location and even get directions to navigate there. Here are our lists from this day:

Boetto Park: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S64044854>

Coffinger Park: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S64048133>

Hassayampa River—Kerkes Park: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S64052660>

Wickenburg—Secret Ponds: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S64056763>

I want to thank everyone for joining me for this trip and I hope to bird with you all in the future!