

THE INTERSECTION

SEVENTEEN YEARS OF BIRD PROCESSING ON
ONE STREET CORNER OF THE WORLD



TOM COLE

Long live Bill Atkinson, Inventor of HyperCard.

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Introduction

Two Databases

One day in May of 1995, I complained to a friend that I had not seen a long-billed dowitcher in ages. I hadn't been out bird watching in quite a while; indeed, for a number of years I had given up the pastime for the most part. He said, "Why don't you go over to Elliot and Cooper Roads? There's a water recharge station there with a bunch of ponds. This month is still good for dowitchers, but you'd better get over there now because most of them will leave by June."

The next weekend I took his advice, and afterwards it became my habit to get up most Saturdays and Sundays and drive to the site with my dog Noodles, a 6 X 4-inch notebook, and my Swift Audubon 8.5 X 44 Porro binoculars.

The notebook was soon filled with entries and so I bought another and another. I soon realized that the notebooks were piling up and there was no good way to examine all the data they contained except by thumbing through the pages.

I bought a commercial bird listing software program and painstakingly entered every bird I had seen at the site along with all of the birds recorded in a stack of old notebooks I had kept over the years. The notebooks dated back to 1971. (I named each of the notebooks "Wild Birds I Have Known" after Ernest Thompson Seton's 1898 book of stories *Wild Animals I Have Known*, and I would continue this practice ever afterwards.) After a few weeks of entering data, I was done, and I could sort any specific finch from all of the many flocks of sparrows and finches I had ever recorded.

The software did much of what I wanted it to do, but I soon became dissatisfied with it; it only provided a place for notes that were associated with a single bird's sighting. There was no way to attach notes to a day's sightings in a particular place so you could use the software as a journal. There were dozens of things I wanted to do with the data, and having some computer experience myself, I felt I could do better.

My old development tool, HyperCard, I knew, was getting rather old and outdated, and I could see a gloomy future for it. But running Windows on my Macintosh and using the HyperCard knock-off called Toolbook to create the new database went against my instincts. I am not fond of Windows, and my hobby would be no fun if I had to work in that environment. I also had never really bothered to get my head around the many ready-made databases out there. Therefore, I went back to my old friend HyperCard and spent a few years developing my own bird processor.

After a great deal of work, I was finally able to enter any bird with a single click and view all of my records in any way I wanted. My basic view of the data was a list of birds with a journal field below it explaining what happened at that particular place on that particular date. (See Figure 1.) Separate notes could be attached to the bird itself. If I clicked on a bird, I would be sent to that bird's screen (See Figure 2.), where I could see every date and place I had ever seen it—and on that screen, clicking on a date would send me to the corresponding journal screen for that place and day with all the birds and notes.

This was exactly what was missing from the commercial software. My database resembled a huge stack of information-filled index cards—nearly 2000 of them—that could be viewed in many different ways. It was a comma-delimited, flat database rather than a relational one, but I didn't care in the least. Since I knew the scripting language of HyperCard, I could also add anything I wanted to the program whenever I got a good idea for a new feature.

One of the first things I did was to create a button to click that would import all of the records from the commercial bird processor. There would be no more tedious entry of records from stacks of paper notebooks. Then, I continued adding features so I could explore time (See Figure 3.) and make reports and lists of birds and trips.

I made buttons for place life lists and year life lists and ones for all kinds of reports. I made buttons that sorted birds by place, year,

month, and day. I made a "big day" button and a "Bird in a Place" button and a dozen other cool views and sorts. All of this was just for fun, but I eventually added a graphing component, and that is what much of the database portion of this book is based on. (See Figure 4.)

HyperCard got old, and I soon had to run the program in the emulated System 9 Environment (called Classic) within Mac OSX. Eventually, the new versions of OSX abandoned Classic, and I found myself and my bird processor also abandoned by the new technology. Luckily, I had already found a new product called Runtime Revolution with which I would be able to convert the program to run as a standalone application on Mac OS, 7, 8, 9, and X, Windows 95, 98, 2000, and XP as well as on Linux and various flavors of UNIX. This meant that with some work, I would be able to use the software on the newest machines—Windows and Macintosh alike—for years and years to come.

I set to work, and as I did I thought of ways to improve the software. It soon was clear that I'd better take the opportunity to build a new, improved database from the ground up. I abandoned what techies used to call the old HyperCard 3 X 5 card metaphor and designed an interface with a single screen on which all data were displayed. All of the data were stored in a single hidden field as a kind of back-end. That would make it a cinch to export everything anywhere if ever I wanted.

I still didn't know how to make a relational database, and I still didn't care. I just made as many improvements as I could think of and built the new machinery just by kind of free associating despite my restless but ever unrequited urge to plan everything out first.

The new bird processor was like the old one; it, too, had acres of scripting and an approach that was akin to something out of a drug addict's nightmare, but it worked much better and was much faster.

I improved the bird entry system by adding a new component to the simple, old-fashioned click-on-the-bird-button method, a

means by which I could type just part of a bird's name and the scripting would grab the bird in question out of all those available and queue it up to be recorded. I even included a way to attach a note to the bird at the same time. Nice.

I know people will say I was completely crazy to build my own database from scratch—twice—especially when I could have used something like FileMaker Pro, but I knew it would be fun to try to dream up all of the script—like doing five thousand crossword puzzles, and so I did it, and it's over, and I'm glad of it.

Whenever I could, I kept the wonderful, hokey, funky look of the old database whose screenshots follow.

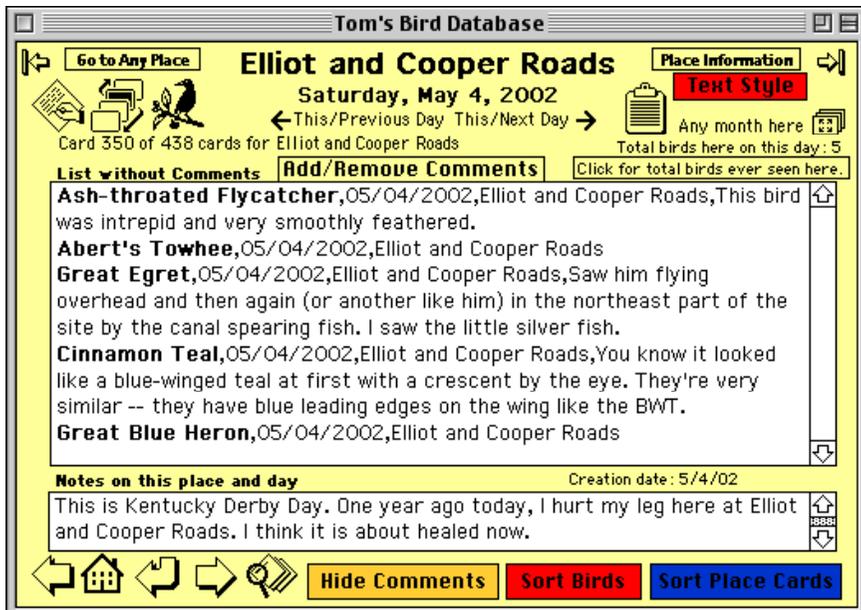


Figure 1: Typical Day's Entry for Elliot and Cooper Roads

One click on a bird takes you to its own card where every sighting of that bird ever made is recorded. (See Figure 2.)



Figure 2: Typical Bird Screen in the Database

A click on a bird takes you to the card for that day (Like Figure 1) with a list of all of the birds seen and the journal entry for that day and place.

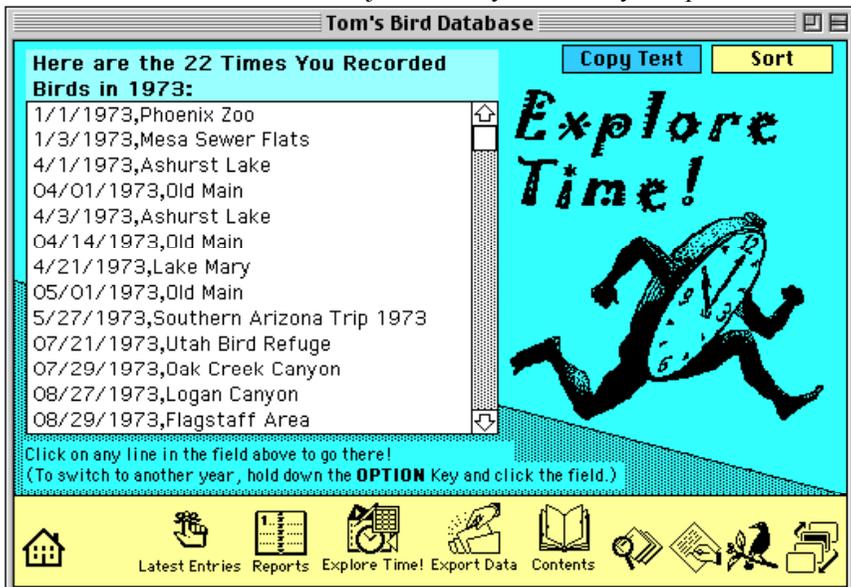


Figure 3: Explore Time Component, one of the many features I created for fun. Clicking on any record in the field takes you to that day with its journal entry and list of birds (Like Figure 1).

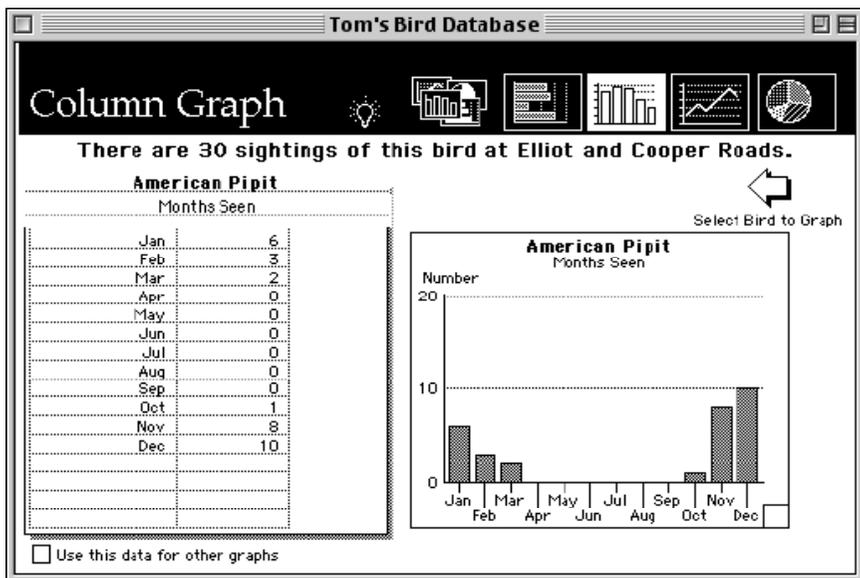


Figure 4: Graphing card which I added to the program.

The graphing component graphs the sightings by month for any or all years and places.

Figure 4 shows the months in which the thirty sightings of the American pipit were made at the site. This particular graph clearly shows the migratory pattern of the bird. It is also practical for bird watchers who can seek out the pipit from late October to around March and perhaps decide to count as misidentifications any sightings in the months when the bird is absent from the graph.

I also wrote scripts to produce information-filled tables. The following one (Figure 5) shows the exact count of the Long-billed Dowitcher for every month and every year from my first visit to August 17, 2003.

The table shows no sightings in June (and next to none in July) for the long-billed dowitcher. It also shows a nine-year record of nine sightings in November of 1998.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER AT ELLIOT AND COOPER ROADS BY MONTH AND YEAR (A Total of 144 Sightings)													
Year	Trips	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1995	1					1							
1996	6												2
1997	11	1											
1998	86	1	1	5	4	1		2	3	2	4	9	3
1999	86	5	2	3	3	4			5	4	4	1	2
2000	63	3	3	3	6				2	3	5	5	1
2001	66	3	3	1	1	2				3	3	1	
2002	78	1	1	5	4			1	3	2	2		
2003	41		1						4				

Figure 5

The Data

To complete the database portions of this book, I first worked from a copy of the original HyperCard database with records from May 7, 1995 to August 17, 2003 only. From these archived data, I created a graph for each bird and a tally. I then began to write the rest of the book.

As I wrote, I realized that new birds would be added to the ongoing list as I continued to visit the site and record them. I decided I'd better write fast. I noted that there were a number of rather common birds that were conspicuously absent from the list: I had, for example, never seen a Harris's hawk, a cardinal, a robin, a night-hawk, a yellow warbler, or an owl at the site.¹ On September 1, 2003, only two trips after I had started work on this book, two golden eagles soared above the parking lot behind the fire station bringing my total number of species to 129. On October 25, six visits after I started, I saw sixteen black-bellied whistling-ducks in Pond 11, a sighting that brought to an end this species' three-year absence. I wondered how I could add such information to the book. I thought of an addendum.

¹ All of these birds, save the night-hawk, were eventually sighted and recorded.

Then I quit working on the book. I had contracts to write two English grammar textbooks in the next few years, and this put my bird book project on the back burner. By the time I got back to it, I was fifty-nine and retired with a new database, more than 1000 visits to the site, and almost 10,000 birds written down by hand for that single street corner. It was time to start up the bird book project again.

I decided to add graphs from the new database to the old version of the book and position them and the ones from the old database side by side. This would give a clear view of how things stood at two different times with two different sets of data.

Well, fairly clear. Anyone who takes the most casual of glances at the graphs will notice at once that the bar graphs from the original program have their bars pointing up in the conventional way while the new database's bar graphs have them pointing straight down. This was not done to create some kind of a mirror image effect. The fact is, I created the graphing component by writing a script that resized bar-shaped objects, each of which represented a month. Bars that represented months with lots of sightings would, of course, be bigger than those that represented months with fewer sightings. Fair enough. Only the objects didn't cooperate. They insisted upon pointing down instead of up. I tried to crank more insistent code to bully the bars, but they would have none of it. I cursed them and threatened to import graphics to get the job done. The bars didn't care. They knew as well I did that I had invested too many hours customizing the scripting to fit bar-shaped objects to ever change course and start all over again. So, in the end, I gave up and let the bars have their own way. Besides, by that time, I had already got used to the way they looked. The reader, I trust, will make a similar adjustment.

Record Keeping

Naturally, not all observers record every species on every single trip to a site. I record each bird unfailingly now, but I didn't used to, so not all of the graphs are as good as records as they

might have been. The graph for the northern mockingbird, for example, would be an almost flat line across all of the months and all of the years had I recorded the bird faithfully. However, I did not write the bird down on each visit because I knew it was always present and because in the HyperCard database I had a maximum of 30,000 characters allotted to record each bird, so I also needed to save space. The result is that the graph for the Northern Mockingbird shows increased frequency that shouldn't be for some months and fewer sightings in months in which it was surely just as abundant. In fact, the old database graph has the bird missing completely from the month of June!

Fortunately, I was far more diligent in recording other birds. I doubt that I *ever* failed to write down the blue-winged teal, for instance. And despite the times I simply jotted down a few interesting birds on a trip and made an incomplete list, the sheer number of visits to the site and birds recorded assure that the graphs for almost all of the birds reflect very real and reasonably accurate trends. Furthermore, since I have now made it a point of honor to record every bird, the database grows more and more accurate. Indeed, any information on recent years is now all inclusive.

In the interest of completeness, I have included the graphs for the very common birds like the mockingbird even though the imperfect nature of my recording has made them inaccurate. Only by including those graphs, however, can this book give a true representation of the databases, and only by including them can all birds on the place life list be represented in these pages.

I have also searched the databases for each bird in order to find out where else it has been sighted. This information is available under the "Other Sites to Try" heading for each bird.

The Currently Archived Database

I retired on May 15, 2010 and have since been visiting the site daily rather than once a week or so. To keep months from being skewed in the graphs by these numerous visits, I chose to wait until

May 15, of 2011 to freeze the new database. The first visit to the site was in May of 1995, so there are records from May to May for 17 years. Figure 6 below shows how each trip to the site breaks down by month. It is really a graph of not a bird's sightings but those of a person's visits (mine) to Elliot and Cooper Roads.

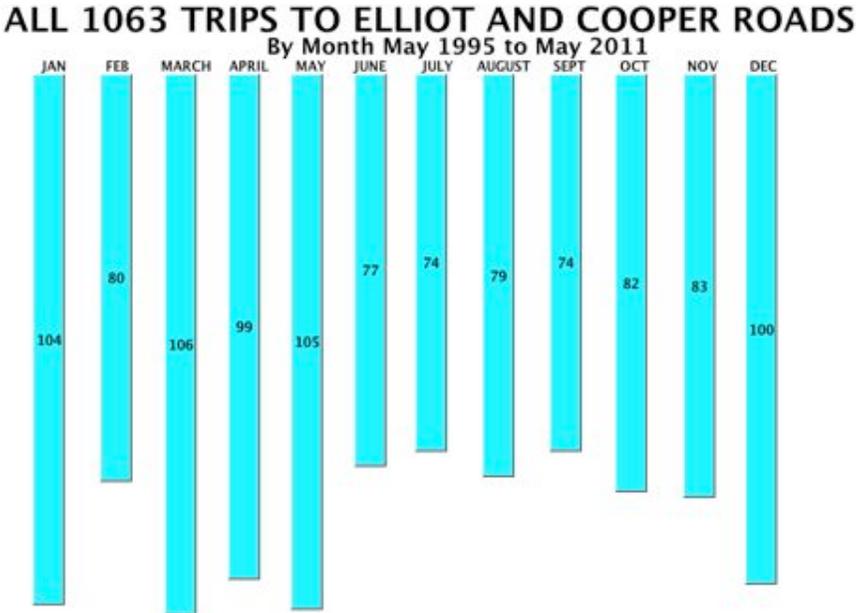


Figure 6
Trips made by the author to Elliot and Cooper Roads by Month

Figure 7 below shows the exact number of trips made to the site by year. Since the new database was archived in May, the year 2011 numbers represent less than half a year of trips.

ALL 1063 TRIPS RECORDED BY YEAR

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
1	6	11	86	86	63	66	78	59	81	72	35	55	30	67	170	97

Figure 7

Bird Information

The information in the book for each bird includes the 12-month graphs, general conclusions from the data, suggestions for other places to find the bird, and basic identification information. These items are included to make the book useful as a very basic guide.

I have included personal remarks and recollections under the heading of "Author's Notes." I hope that some of these short observations, database notes, and essays will be valuable to beginners who want to learn more specifics about particular birds in the database. Mostly, though, I hope they will simply be interesting to birders and others who might enjoy reading about one person's experiences bird watching at Elliot and Cooper Roads and elsewhere.

I have kept a written journal, and often excerpts from it are included in the book in normal font style. When text comes directly from the database, however, I have italicized it to indicate that this is so. Items in the database bird records are separated by commas, and I have four basic items. Bird, Date, Place, and Bird Notes. Thus a single bird record might look like this in the book:

*Cedar Waxwing,05/19/2005,Boyce Thompson
Arboretum,In Demo Garden. Oh so smooth and
perfectly colored. Saw more than one. Perfect view
of red wax.*

In the above comma-delimited record, commas can only be used to separate the four items. Therefore, there can be no use of commas in any of the prose in the Bird Notes item.

The journal records that go with each trip to a site are not seen in the above example because they are not attached to the bird but to the date. Commas within the prose are present in journal records because tabs instead of commas are used as the delimiter. Journal records in the book and database are usually positioned below the

bird record as in the case of this three-item single bird record, which happens not to have a bird note attached to it:

Ross's Goose, 03/29/1983, Park at North End of Dobson Road

*Park at North End of Dobson Road 03/29/1983
Mom and Dad and I went to a park at the end of Dobson Road, where we heard there was a Ross's Goose, an arctic creature. The goose was there.*

I have have done almost no editing of any of these records, which are often rather informally written.

Many of the journal entries have important information about the site such as the following that deals with the plume of contaminants that lies underground just north of the site. I noticed that little water was being put into the site and called the Riparian Institute. I was told that they were concerned about filling the ponds with water as it might draw the contaminant into more sensitive parts of the aquifer. I was also informed that they had put too much money and effort into the site to ever abandon it entirely, but for the time being, there would be less water put into the ponds. The journal entry reads:

Elliot and Cooper Roads 11/11/2003 Saw a coyote out there and I took his picture. He was by pond 10 — on the north shore. NEW SIGN SAYING: "The Town of Gilbert has decreased the volume of water to this facility indefinitely. Migratory birds can be observed by visiting the Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch located at the south east corner of Greenfield Road and Guadalupe Road. Thank you."

Another journal entry records another milestone in terms of the degradation of the site—the loss of the field to the south. It also

records a mystery towhee that I came only inches from recording as a canyon towhee and raising the number of birds on the place life list.

***Elliot and Cooper Roads 5/9/1998** Today I got up late (about 8:00) and went to Elliot and Cooper. There were few birds there. I thought I saw a new towhee as there were three there that looked just like Abert's towhees but had no black masks. I don't know though. Saw a horned lark and it may be the last I see there as they are leveling the field by Elliot and Cooper.*

In many places, I have added information on the birds for other local sites that bird watchers may be interested in. One of these sites is the southwest quadrant of Elliot and McQueen Roads, a field only a mile from the Elliot and Cooper site. I made 165 visits there. This area is bordered by the railroad tracks on the west and McQueen Road on the east. It is just north of Mesquite High School. I was surprised to see some of the birds I saw there and I have sufficient records to make the data interesting—and, of course, it is so close to Elliot and Cooper Roads that some of these birds might be expected to be seen there as well. Unfortunately, the area is being developed and soon will be a rather poor spot for birding. I'm glad nonetheless to have saved the data for posterity.

Another site is at Greenfield and Guadalupe Roads, also called the Water Ranch. It is perhaps the best birding area I have ever been to. It's certainly by far the best in the Phoenix area. I have records for 173 trips there. I also have good data for Baseline and Power Roads, Gilbert and Riggs Roads, Pima Canyon in South Mountain Park, Higley and Ocotillos Roads, and the Boyce Thompson Arboretum near Superior, Arizona. I have included information for all of these places in order to add to the usefulness of the book.

I believe that beginners might use this book with a standard field guide to get their new hobby off to a faster start. I also think that experienced bird watchers may find the information in this book interesting and helpful if not for scientific purposes then just for planning a day's birding. All of the sites mentioned in this book can easily be visited in a few hours, and if the large number of ducks and shorebirds present at Elliot and Cooper Roads and the Water Ranch are combined with the desert birds of Pima Canyon and the woodland varieties at Boyce Thompson Arboretum, a fairly impressive day list could result. This book, then, could also help people in planning a "big day" or preparing to get the greatest possible number of life listers for a visiting out-of-town bird watcher.

Whatever its use, I have had a tremendous amount of fun collecting this information, working with it on my computer, and finally arranging it on paper in the way you see it now.

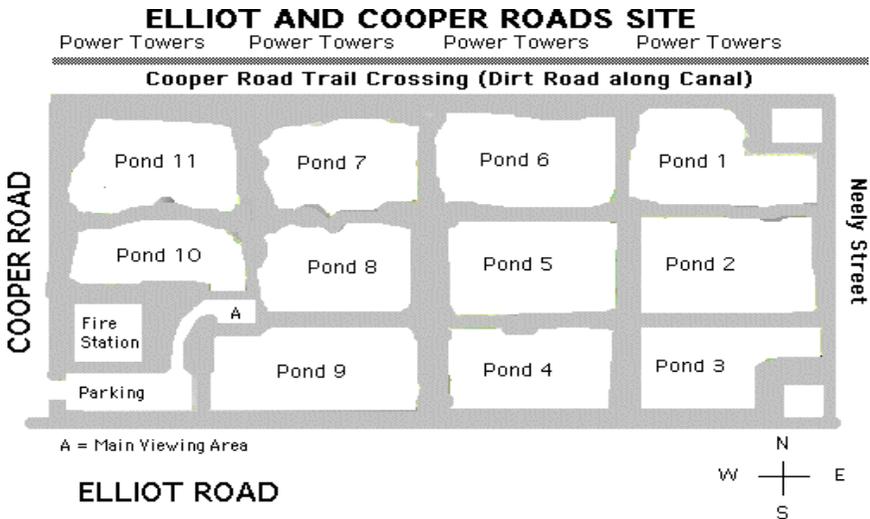


Figure 8
Map of the Elliot and Cooper Roads site. Viewing areas with green blinds covering the fences are located along the canal road to the north.

Life List for Elliot and Cooper Roads

Total Species Seen: 149

The Elliot and Cooper Roads database has records for 1063 days and 13,263 sightings of the 149 birds on the following list. The first 128 birds are listed in taxonomic order. The database also contains records for what I call generic birds such as “generic blackbird” or “generic flycatcher” which cannot be on a life list. The count with these birds included is 13,318. I enter generic birds when I’m unsure of the exact species.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Pied-billed Grebe 3/19/1998 | 22. Northern Shoveler |
| 2. Eared Grebe 12/23/1996 | 12/1/1996 |
| 3. Double-crested Cormorant | 23. Northern Pintail 12/1/1996 |
| 03/24/2002 | 24. Green-winged Teal |
| 4. American Bittern 11/7/1999 | 12/1/1996 |
| 5. Least Bittern 5/16/1999 | 25. Canvasback 11/21/1998 |
| 6. Great Blue Heron 12/1/1996 | 26. Redhead 04/08/2001 |
| 7. Great Egret 10/25/1998 | 27. Ring-necked Duck |
| 8. Snowy Egret 4/24/1999 | 12/26/1996 |
| 9. Tricolored Heron 10/8/2000 | 28. Bufflehead 12/23/1996 |
| 10. Cattle Egret 12/12/1998 | 29. Common Goldeneye |
| 11. Green Heron 12/23/1996 | 11/02/2002 |
| 12. Black-crowned Night- | 30. Ruddy Duck 12/1/1996 |
| Heron 2/8/1998 | 31. Osprey 10/1/2000 |
| 13. White-faced Ibis 5/25/1997 | 32. Northern Harrier 1/1/1997 |
| 14. Turkey Vulture 5/25/1997 | 33. Sharp-shinned Hawk |
| 15. Black-bellied Whistling- | 8/30/1998 |
| Duck 12/1/1996 | 34. Cooper's Hawk 10/25/1998 |
| 16. Canada Goose 10/31/1998 | 35. Swainson's Hawk |
| 17. Gadwall 12/1/1996 | 11/6/1999 |
| 18. American Wigeon | 36. Red-tailed Hawk 12/1/1996 |
| 12/1/1996 | 37. Ferruginous Hawk |
| 19. Mallard 12/1/1996 | 2/15/1998 |
| 20. Blue-winged Teal | 38. American Kestrel |
| 12/1/1996 | 12/30/1996 |
| 21. Cinnamon Teal 12/31/1996 | 39. Peregrine Falcon 1/11/1997 |

40. Prairie Falcon 5/29/2000
41. Ring-necked Pheasant
10/25/1998
42. Gambel's Quail 3/14/1998
43. Sora 3/15/1999
44. Common Moorhen
5/25/1997
45. American Coot 12/1/1996
46. Killdeer 12/23/1996
47. Black-necked Stilt
12/1/1996
48. American Avocet 1/1/1997
49. Greater Yellowlegs
12/30/1996
50. Lesser Yellowlegs
2/20/1999
51. Solitary Sandpiper 4/2/2000
52. Spotted Sandpiper 5/3/1998
53. Western Sandpiper
4/18/1998
54. Least Sandpiper 12/1/1996
55. Dunlin 2/23/1997
56. Stilt Sandpiper 10/16/1999
57. Long-billed Dowitcher
5/7/1995
58. Common Snipe 12/12/1998
59. Wilson's Phalarope
2/15/1998
60. Franklin's Gull 5/2/1999
61. Ring-billed Gull 9/5/1999
62. Forster's Tern 9/5/1998
63. Rock Dove 12/30/1996
64. White-winged Dove
4/18/1998
65. Mourning Dove 12/1/1996
66. Inca Dove 12/1/1996
67. Greater Roadrunner
12/26/1996
68. Vaux's Swift 4/25/1999
69. Black-chinned
Hummingbird 5/9/1999
70. Anna's Hummingbird
12/29/1996
71. Costa's Hummingbird
02/02/2002
72. Broad-tailed Hummingbird
09/07/2002
73. Belted Kingfisher
8/29/1999
74. Gila Woodpecker
12/11/1999
75. Northern Flicker 12/5/1998
76. Dusky Flycatcher 5/9/1999
77. Black Phoebe 12/23/1996
78. Say's Phoebe 1/31/1998
79. Vermilion Flycatcher
12/27/1997
80. Ash-throated Flycatcher
5/1/1999
81. Western Kingbird
12/27/1997
82. Loggerhead Shrike
12/26/1996
83. Western Scrub-Jay
10/1/2000
84. Common Raven 11/6/1998
85. Horned Lark 12/26/1996
86. Tree Swallow 10/10/1998
87. Violet-green Swallow
4/1/1998
88. Northern Rough-winged
Swallow 1/19/1998
89. Cliff Swallow 2/15/1998

90. Barn Swallow 4/1/1998
91. Verdin 12/26/1996
92. Cactus Wren 11/15/1998
93. Marsh Wren 1/25/1998
94. Ruby-crowned Kinglet
12/29/1998
95. Northern Mockingbird
12/26/1996
96. Curve-billed Thrasher
10/8/2000
97. European Starling
12/26/1996
98. American Pipit 1/18/1997
99. Phainopepla 05/05/2002
100. Orange-crowned Warbler
11/6/1998
101. Yellow-rumped Warbler
12/1/1996
102. Townsend's Warbler
09/07/2002
103. Common Yellowthroat
1/10/1999
104. Wilson's Warbler 7/4/1998
105. Western Tanager
05/12/2002
106. Green-tailed Towhee
4/25/1999
107. Abert's Towhee 1/25/1998
108. Chipping Sparrow
5/9/1999
109. Brewer's Sparrow
9/7/1998
110. Vesper Sparrow
12/12/1998
111. Lark Sparrow 11/7/1998
112. Black-throated Sparrow
12/1/1996
113. Savannah Sparrow
1/11/1997
114. Song Sparrow 1/31/1998
115. White-crowned Sparrow
1/1/1997
116. Black-headed Grosbeak
5/2/1998
117. Lazuli Bunting
05/12/2002
118. Red-winged Blackbird
12/1/1996
119. Western Meadowlark
1/31/1998
120. Yellow-headed Blackbird
5/25/1997
121. Brewer's Blackbird
11/03/2002
122. Great-tailed Grackle
12/26/1996
123. Bronzed Cowbird
05/18/2002
124. Brown-headed Cowbird
8/29/1998
125. Hooded Oriole 8/12/2000
126. House Finch 12/26/1996
127. Lesser Goldfinch
10/25/1998
128. House Sparrow 1/18/1998

Twenty-one birds were added in the eight years after the HyperCard database was archived bringing the total to 149 species. They are in chronological order:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 129. Golden Eagle
09/01/2003 | 140. Northern Cardinal
12/23/2006 |
| 130. Wood Duck 03/27/2004 | 141. Gray Flycatcher
04/22/2007 |
| 131. Western Wood-Pewee
04/24/2004 | 142. Great Horned Owl
01/21/2008 |
| 132. Black-throated Gray
Warbler 05/09/2004 | 143. Ladder-backed
Woodpecker 01/06/2010 |
| 133. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
10/02/2004 | 144. Neotropic Cormorant
01/08/2010 |
| 134. Lesser Scaup 11/07/2004 | 145. Bewick's Wren
01/09/2010 |
| 135. Yellow Warbler
01/01/2005 | 146. American Robin
2/6/2010 |
| 136. Harris's Hawk
01/22/2005 | 147. Nashville Warbler
9/2/2010 |
| 137. MacGillivray's Warbler
09/18/2005 | 148. Peach-faced Lovebird
12/10/2010 |
| 138. Gilded Flicker
11/06/2005 | 149. Black-hooded Parakeet
4/12/2011 |
| 139. Eurasian Collared Dove
07/02/2006 | |

Most Numerous Birds

Out of 149 species, the mourning dove wins with the Abert's towhee coming in second place. In all, 13,263 birds were recorded between August 17, 2003 and May 15 2011.²

Mourning Dove 529	Say's Phoebe 205
Abert's Towhee 525	American Coot 204
Killdeer 515	Rock Dove 202
Northern Mockingbird 495	House Sparrow 201
Verdin 486	White-winged Dove 191
Anna's Hummingbird 452	American Kestrel 181
House Finch 444	American Avocet 171
Great-tailed Grackle 428	Turkey Vulture 171
Mallard 382	Greater Yellowlegs 168
Gila Woodpecker 364	Great Blue Heron 163
Northern Rough-winged	American Wigeon 156
Swallow 357	Cinnamon Teal 152
Yellow-rumped Warbler 349	Greater Roadrunner 134
European Starling 337	Red-winged Blackbird 130
Gambel's Quail 337	Loggerhead Shrike 127
Black-necked Stilt 313	Black Phoebe 123
Curve-billed Thrasher 300	Red-tailed Hawk 98
Long-billed Dowitcher 300	Green Heron 86
Inca Dove 294	Blue-winged Teal 82
Green-winged Teal 282	Great Egret 81
Least Sandpiper 276	Orange-crowned Warbler 78
Northern Shoveler 257	Peregrine Falcon 76
White-crowned Sparrow 251	Ring-necked Duck 74
Gadwall 230	Cliff Swallow 65
Northern Pintail 212	Brown-headed Cowbird 61

² Were any of the “generic” birds to appear here, the total would be 13,318. See both figure 9 below and the introduction to the Elliot and Cooper Roads Life List for more on “generic” birds.

Barn Swallow 50	Western Meadowlark 13
Ruddy Duck 50	Sora 12
Western Kingbird 49	Common Raven 11
Black-chinned Hummingbird 45	Eared Grebe 11
Northern Flicker 45	Lesser Goldfinch 11
Northern Harrier 42	Marsh Wren 11
Pied-billed Grebe 41	Solitary Sandpiper 11
Common Moorhen 33	Tree Swallow 11
American Pipit 31	Gray Flycatcher 10
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 31	Hooded Oriole 10
Spotted Sandpiper 31	Wilson's Phalarope 10
Brewer's Sparrow 30	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 9
Common Snipe 30	Western Wood-Pewee 8
Cooper's Hawk 27	Wood Duck 8
Vermilion Flycatcher 25	Brewer's Blackbird 7
Canada Goose 24	Peach-faced Lovebird 6
Lesser Yellowlegs 24	Savannah Sparrow 6
Black-crowned Night-Heron 23	Sharp-shinned Hawk 5
Violet-green Swallow 23	Western Sandpiper 5
Wilson's Warbler 23	Yellow Warbler 5
Ash-throated Flycatcher 22	Belted Kingfisher 4
Snowy Egret 22	Black-headed Grosbeak 4
Yellow-headed Blackbird 19	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 4
Double-Crested Cormorant 18	Cactus Wren 4
Green-tailed Towhee 18	Chipping Sparrow 4
White-faced Ibis 16	Dusky Flycatcher 4
Eurasian Collared Dove 15	Lazuli Bunting 4
Horned Lark 15	Stilt Sandpiper 4
Bufflehead 14	Common Yellowthroat 3
Black-throated Sparrow 13	Ferruginous Hawk 3
Osprey 13	Harris's Hawk 3
Redhead 13	MacGillivray's Warbler 3
Song Sparrow 13	Northern Cardinal 3
	Tricolored Heron 3
	Vaux's Swift 3

- Bewick's Wren 2
- Black-throated Gray Warbler 2
- Canvasback 2
- Cattle Egret 2
- Forster's Tern 2
- Golden Eagle 2
- Ladder-backed Woodpecker 2
- Lark Sparrow 2
- Least Bittern 2
- Lesser Scaup 2
- Neotropic Cormorant 2
- Phainopepla 2
- Prairie Falcon 2
- Ring-necked Pheasant 2
- Western Tanager 2
- American Bittern 1
- American Robin 1
- Black-hooded Parakeet 1
- Broad-tailed Hummingbird 1
- Bronzed Cowbird 1
- Common Goldeneye 1
- Costa's Hummingbird 1
- Dunlin 1
- Franklin's Gull 1
- Gilded Flicker 1
- Great Horned Owl 1
- Nashville Warbler 1
- Ring-billed Gull 1
- Swainson's Hawk 1
- Townsend's Warbler 1
- Vesper Sparrow 1
- Western Scrub-Jay 1

BIRD NUMBERS AT ELLIOT AND COOPER ROADS

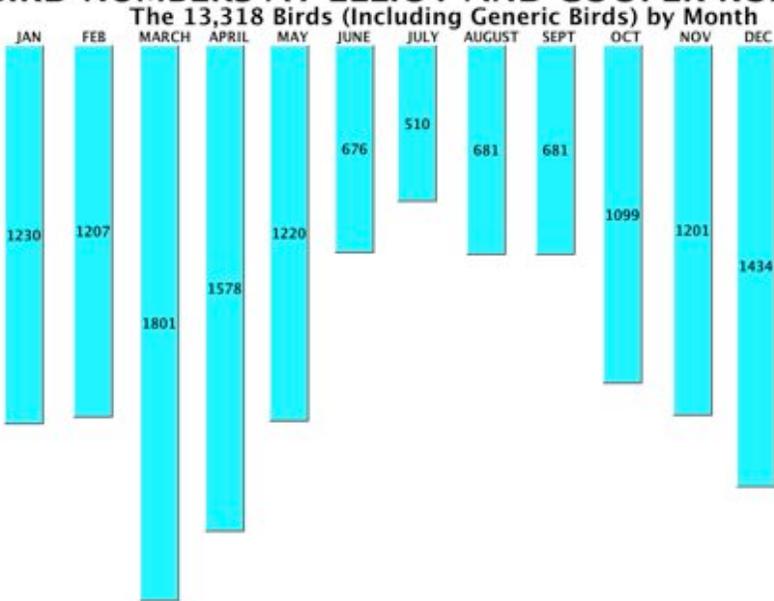


Figure 9
All 13,318 Birds Recorded by Month Including Generic Birds.

Figure 10 below shows the exact number of birds recorded at the site by year. Since the new database was archived in May, the year 2011 number represents less than half a year of trips.

TOTAL NUMBER OF BIRDS RECORDED BY YEAR

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03
1	49	32	978	1097	757	396	453	385
04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	
1631	924	316	752	340	955	2418	1834	

Figure 10

Sightings of Every Bird Recorded at Elliot and Cooper Roads by Year.

Most Numerous Birds by Family (13,263 Birds)

Ducks, Geese, and Swans 1972

Pigeons and Doves 1231

American Sparrows, Towhees, and Juncos 863

Sandpipers and Their Allies 860

Mockingbirds and Thrashers 795

Blackbirds, Meadowlarks, Cowbirds, Grackles, and Orioles 669

Lapwings and Plovers 515

Swallows and Martins 506

Hummingbirds 499

Verdin 486

Stilts and Avocets 484

Wood-warblers 465

Finches 455

Tyrant flycatchers 446

Woodpeckers, Sapsuckers, and Flickers 412

Bitterns, Herons, and Egrets 383

New World Quail 337

Starlings 337

Caracaras and Falcons 259

Rails, Gallinules, and Coots 249

Old World Sparrows 201

Eagles, Kites, and Their Allies 181

New World Vultures 171
Cuckoos, Roadrunners, and Anis 134
Shrikes 127
Grebes 52
Wagtails and Pipits 31
Cormorants 20
Wrens 17
Ibises and Spoonbills 16
Larks 15
Osprey 13
Jays, Crows, Magpies, and Ravens 12
Cardinals, Grosbeaks and Their Allies 11
Kinglets 9
Lories and Lorikeets, Parakeets, Macaws, and Parrots 7
Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers 4
Kingfishers 4
Gnatcatchers 4
Swifts 3
Partridges, Grouse, Turkeys, and Old World Quail 2
Tanagers 2
Silky-flycatchers 2
Typical Owls 1
Thrushes 1

Non-Passerines (7809 Sightings)

Ducks, Geese, and Swans 1972
Pigeons and doves 1231
Sandpipers and Their Allies 860
Lapwings and Plovers 515
Hummingbirds 499
Stilts and Avocets 484
Bitterns, Herons, and Egrets 383
Woodpeckers, Sapsuckers, and Flickers 412
New World Quail 337
Caracaras and Falcons 259
Rails, Gallinules, and Coots 249

Eagles, Kites, and Their Allies 181
New World Vultures 171
Cuckoos, Roadrunners, and Anis 134
Grebes 52
Cormorants 20
Ibises and Spoonbills 16
Osprey 13
Lories and Lorikeets, Parakeets, Macaws, and Parrots 7
Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers 4
Kingfishers 4
Swifts 3
Partridges, Grouse, Turkeys, and Old World Quail 2
Typical Owls 1

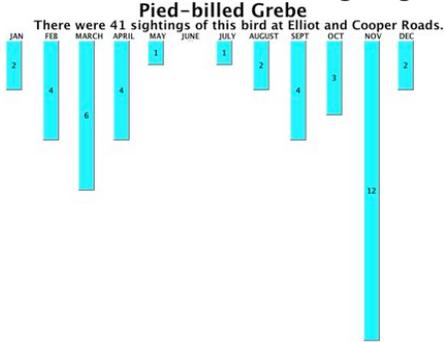
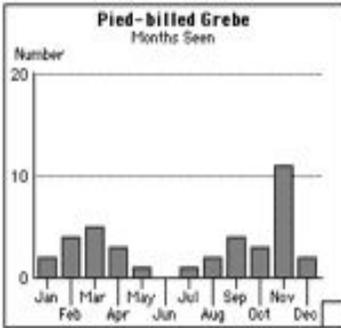
Passerines (5454 Sightings)

American Sparrows, Towhees, and Juncos 863
Mockingbirds and Thrashers 795
Blackbirds, Meadowlarks, Cowbirds, Grackles, and Orioles 669
Swallows and Martins 506
Verdin 486
Wood-warblers 465
Finches 455
Tyrant flycatchers 446
Starlings 337
Old World Sparrows 201
Shrikes 127
Wagtails and Pipits 31
Wrens 17
Larks 15
Jays, Crows, Magpies, and Ravens 12
Cardinals, Grosbeaks and Their Allies 11
Kinglets 9
Gnatcatchers 4
Tanagers 2
Silky-flycatchers 2
Thrushes 1

PIED-BILLED GREBE

1995-2003 Database: 38 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 41 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			11	20	3	4			3							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: No June sighting in 17 years and no sightings at all in the last seven years.

Other Sites to Try:

The database has 74 records for the Water Ranch, 18 for Ayer Lake at Boyce Thompson Arboretum, eight for Tempe Town Lake, three for Baseline and Power Roads, two for the Phoenix Zoo Ponds, one for Higley and Ocotillo Roads, and one for Gilbert and Riggs Roads. Local records exist for all 12 months.

Identification: Watch for this drab diving bird in the deeper parts of the ponds. The fat, usually two-toned, chicken beak of the pied-billed makes identification easy.

Author's Notes:

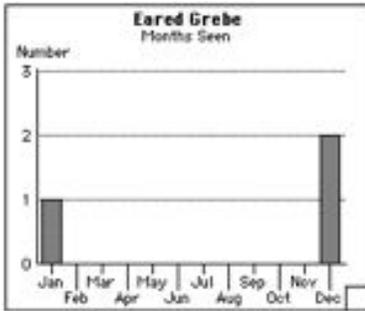
One of my memories has a hen with her brood swimming after it, surprised at the sudden appearance of our cotton crew at a desert

stock tank somewhere in an Arizona summer more than forty years ago.

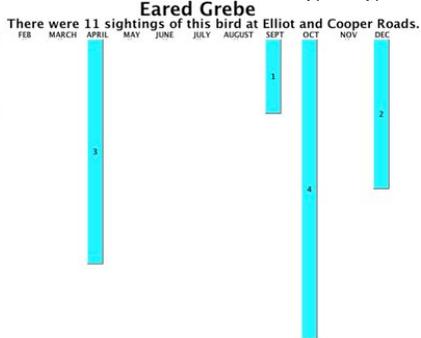
The database also reminds me that on Friday June 28, 2002, I looked across Canyon Lake and saw a pied-billed grebe paddling in the dark water while trying to choke down an impossibly large bluegill. I don't know if he was able to swallow the fish, but by the bird's earnest diligence, it was evident that he believed he could. This is the time, I remember, that my brother, my nephew, and I swam across the lake to the cliffs, climbed them, and jumped into the cold water. The sighting of the grebe, a bookmark in the database and in my brain, lets me recall the blazing heat of that summer day, the sting of the sunscreen in my eyes, the slipperiness of the jagged rocks at the water's edge—and the fun we had.

EARED GREBE

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings



1995-2011 Database: 11 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	2	1							8							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Except for 2004, the bird has been rare at the site. Seen twice in December of 1996 and once in January of 1997. One note attached to the bird reads:

Eared Grebe, 04/10/2004, Elliot and Cooper Roads, Eared Grebe not seen here since January 1st of 1997!! More than seven years absent.

Other Sites to Try:

The database has records for this bird at Gilbert and Riggs Roads in April of 1998 and at Canyon Lake in February of 1987.

Identification: In winter, look for the angular head showing dark above white. The sharp pointed bill is much different from the pied-billed grebe's, and its neck is much narrower.

Author's Notes:

While I have 181 sightings of the pied-billed grebe for all sites in the database, I have but 34 for the eared grebe. My first sighting of the eared grebe was at the Phoenix Sewer Flats on October 23, 1973. I'm sure that the site doesn't even exist anymore, but it was there and then that we found dozens and dozens of dead ducks lying everywhere. My dad said he thought it was natural for that many to lie dead there as the population of ducks was so large that a reasonable death rate would account for those carcasses. I wasn't sold. To my mind, it wasn't natural at all.

Years later at Elliot and Cooper Roads, I began to see dead birds lying on the shores of the ponds. Soon it became obvious that something was wrong. They were mostly ducks, but there was the occasional black-necked stilt lying dead out there. I heard that it was a bad case of avian botulism.

It wasn't long afterwards that I noticed that no water was being put into the pond behind the fire station. I wrote about it in an e-mail to a professor whose writing class I was going to take. He happened to be a bird watcher, and I must have also mentioned seeing the bronzed cowbird at ASU because on July 27, 2000 he wrote:

Bronzed cowbird's a good Tempe bird, I think. I hear there are two brown pelicans at the east end of Town Lake, near the 202 overpass to the north. I've sent on your info to the English dept. You should be all set. Is there any water at the Gilbert Ponds? Shorebirds are on their way, looking for landing spots...

Paul

I replied, perhaps trying to impress with my galvanizing use of metaphor:

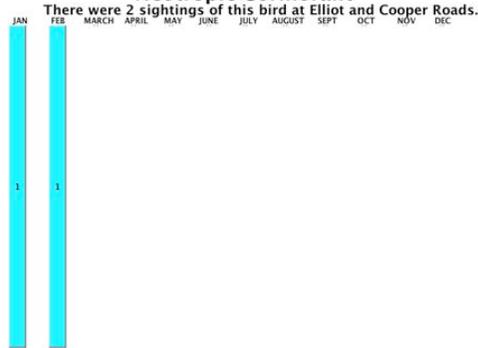
Is there water at Elliott and Cooper Roads? Don't get me started. It has been allowed to evaporate for months now. All the reeds have died and the marsh wren has no marsh. The viewing area overlooks a parched, dusty Sahara of cracked mud flats, the desiccated ruins of the shorebird dreamland that once I knew. This scramble of tinderized bushes, this HOLOCAUST of baking earth is no fit "landing spot" for any shorebird I ever heard of.

Tom

In less truculent terms, I sent an e-mail to the Riparian Institute and received a polite reply saying that several thousand ducks had died out there and that they intended to let the desert sun bake the area all summer in an attempt to get rid of the botulism. In the fall, they would fill the ponds and hope for the best. It must have worked because I have only seen a couple of dead ducks out there since.

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT

1995-2011 Database: 2 Sightings
Neotropic Cormorant



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
															2	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch.

Identification: Doesn't have the orange pouch of the double-crested and has a more slender bill.

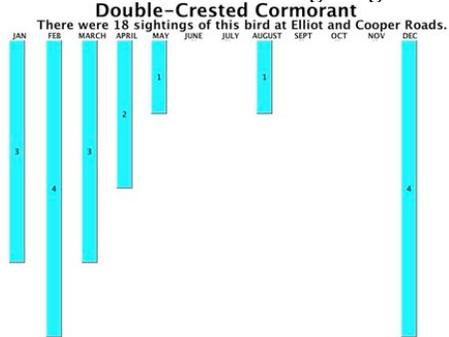
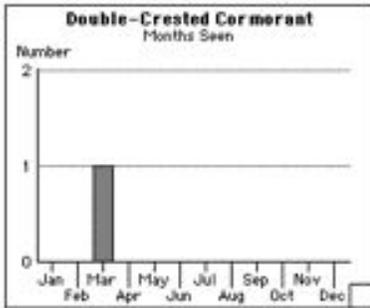
Author's Notes:

Neotropic Cormorant, 01/08/2010, Elliot and Cooper Roads, AH. The 800th trip and I see this guy flying by. I say "Well he's got no orange bill and neotropics are outnumbering the double-cresteds now and so I'm giving myself a place life lister on the 800th trip. It's high time I added the neotropic and I'm hardly cheating at all. On the 700th trip you'll remember I got the great horned owl.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting

1995-2011 Database: 18 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
							1		1	5		3		4	3	1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Used to be rare at the site but later became a bit more common.

Other Sites to Try:

Tempe Town Lake and the Water Ranch are the best bets. Records also exist in the database for the Verde River on 4/3/1998 and 05/12/2002 and Baseline and Power Roads on 10/3/1999.

Identification: The double-crested cormorant has an orange throat pouch, which is a key field mark, and the cormorant's long-necked profile in flight. Like other cormorants, it swims with its bill pointed up. There aren't many birds that look very much like it with the exception of the other cormorants and perhaps the anhinga, whose beak is pointed and who doesn't even live in Arizona.

Author's Notes:

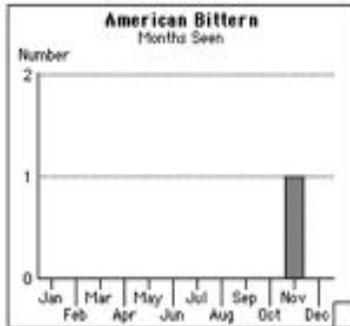
Cormorants are the birds that people have used to fish with in the far east. A ring is placed around the bird's neck and a line

attached, and it is allowed to dive for fish. When it is hauled back up, the fish is still in its mouth as the ring does not allow the bird to swallow. The double-crested cormorant differs only a little from the neotropic cormorant. The database shows me that on July 18, 1999, I was bird watching in Yucatan near an alligator-invested lake in a place named Coba and made these journal notes regarding the anhinga and the neotropic cormorant:

The lake was surprisingly unbirdy. There were neotropic cormorants and anhingas sitting on posts out there, but not even coots swam in the lake. Larry got out his scope and we drove to the far side of the lake and set it up. All we saw were the cormorants and anhingas. Neither bird produces a water repellent oil so that's why they were on the posts—to dry out in the sun. If they don't dry out a lot, their feathers get soaked clean through and the next time they get in the water they just sink to the bottom and drown. That's my theory anyway.

AMERICAN BITTERN

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				1												

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site. This bird was observed in Pond 10 from the observation area behind the fire station. The only sighting of the American Bittern was on November 7, 1999.

Other Sites to Try:

Seen also at the Water Ranch on 12/10/2005 and 12/17/2005.

Identification: Look to reedy areas near shore for this one. The American Bittern is best compared to the drab immature black-crowned night-heron. In flight, however, the dark of the trailing edges of the wing are visible and there is a black streak like an exaggerated eye line on the bird's cheek. Watch for an upright "freezing" posture in the reeds.

Author's Notes:

The following note is attached to this bird for this sighting:

American Bittern, 11/7/1999, Elliot and Cooper Roads, I remember this really unusual bird fly over to those reeds where I first saw the least bittern. This one was different from any other heron-like bird.

LEAST BITTERN

1995-2003 Database: 2 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				1		1										

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site. In April (1999) it was observed in Pond 10 from the observation area behind the fire station. In May (2001) it was seen from the canal road in the northeast area near pond 6, where it was being harassed by great-tailed grackles. It displayed "freezing" behavior.

Other Sites to Try:

No other records exist for this bird in the database.

Identification: As the author's notes below attest, the bird can be mistaken at first glance for a green heron. The green heron, however, is more evenly dark. Look for large light patches on the least bittern's wing and a long, narrow white line down the shoulder.

Author's Notes:

My copy of *Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County Arizona* lists the Least Bittern as rare in Maricopa County and April is not

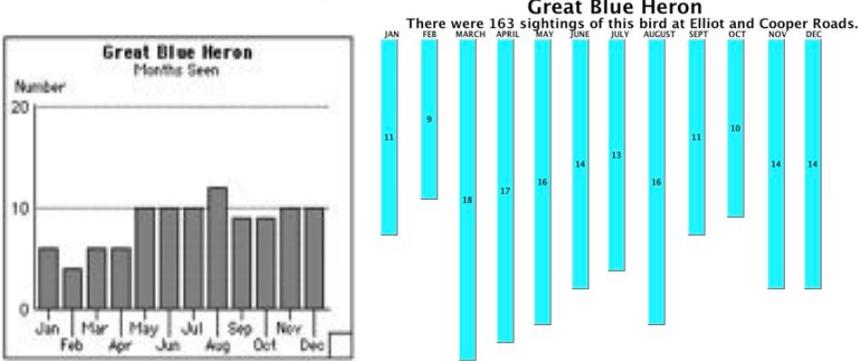
even the best month for him. My notes attached to the bird for those sightings read:

Least Bittern, 5/16/1999, Elliot and Cooper Roads, I was standing under the observation area by pond 10 watching birds with another visitor. I was mumbling off a list of birds as I saw them and said, "Green Heron—gosh he sure is a funny color." The other visitor to the site looked and said "That's a least bittern!" We looked in our books to match the bird against its paintings.

Least Bittern, 04/21/2001, Elliot and Cooper Roads, N.E. corner. Grackles bugging him. Freezes!

GREAT BLUE HERON

1995-2003 Database: 102* Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 163 Sightings



*The 2003 database was archived on 8/17/03. The tally of the 2003 sightings in the table below is 107 rather than 102 because it includes the balance of birds seen in that year. This will be true elsewhere in the book. I mention this in case very assiduous readers should occasionally notice an apparent discrepancy.

Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	2	1	28	24	22	8	16	6	22	10	3	6	3	2	4	6

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The database shows the bird seen with rather even regularity throughout the year.

Other Sites to Try: Sightings exist in the database for Gilbert and Riggs Roads, the Water Ranch, Higley and Ocotillo Roads, and the Verde River, but it is so common that you should expect to see it most anywhere.

Identification: It is hard to misidentify this common giant. Unless a Sandhill crane happens by the site, there should be nothing this big standing in the water or perching in a tree.

Author's Notes:

The great blue heron seems to be the layman's favorite as it is so big that everyone seems to be aware of it. In Minnesota, we used to throw dead yellow perch to these huge pterodactyl-like birds, but the great blue heron is at home everywhere in the country—even at times in the desert if water is nearby. I came across a great blue heron in a patch of Sonoran desert near the Verde River on December 24, 1971. The sight of this bird walking on its long legs through the saguaros has remained a clear picture in my mind unchanged over the years.

I write in my journal about some people who said they had seen a big crane:

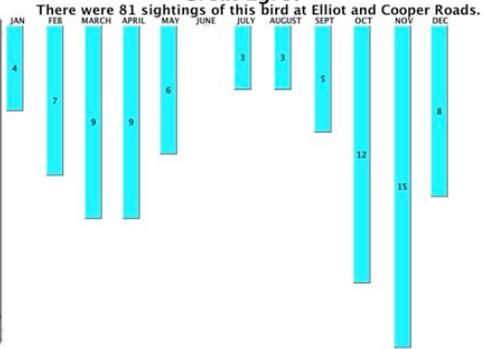
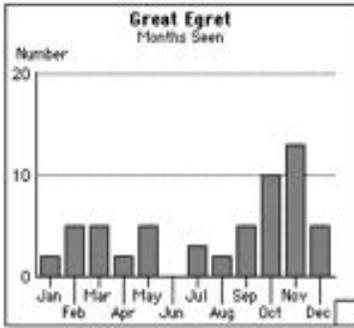
"No, no," I said. "You probably didn't see a crane. We've only got two, the whooping crane and the sandhill crane, and neither was a likely sighting for you. You probably saw a heron, a great blue heron."

I had a feeling of satisfaction because later, I knew, they would be passing on this new knowledge and would say to a friend, "No, no! That isn't a crane. It's a blue herring!"

GREAT EGRET

1995-2003 Database: 57 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 81 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			9	20	10	4	12	5	7	4		2	3		3	2

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: For the most part, seen rather regularly throughout the year.

Other Sites to Try: The database also contains records for this bird at Baseline and Power Roads and Gilbert and Riggs Roads. One note attached to the bird for July 29th, 2001 for the latter site reads: "*Ten zillion great egrets*"

Identification: White, big. Yellowish beak and dark legs. The neck and legs are much longer than those of the smaller cattle egret.

Author's Notes:

The great egret, formerly known as the American egret, nearly became extinct in the 1800s because it was hunted and killed so that its plumes could be used to adorn ladies' hats. Efforts by conservationists changed some attitudes towards the use of plumes

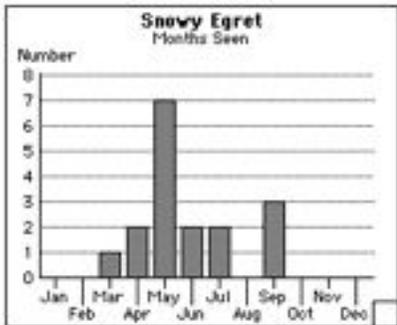
on hats and with the end of the fashion, the birds were saved from extinction.

I remember a story about a coyote sitting near a great egret. The observer understood exactly why the coyote did not make a play for the bird. One might suppose that there is enough meat on the egret to make attacking one worth the effort, but then coyotes do not generally eat egrets. Despite a sometimes opportunistic nature, the coyote, like most wild creatures, does not invite injury. In the wild, injury, of course, means death as an injured animal may not be able to hunt or otherwise procure nourishment even if it doesn't die of infection from a wound. The coyote sat content by the egret having no wish to be poked in the eye by the bird's sharp bill.

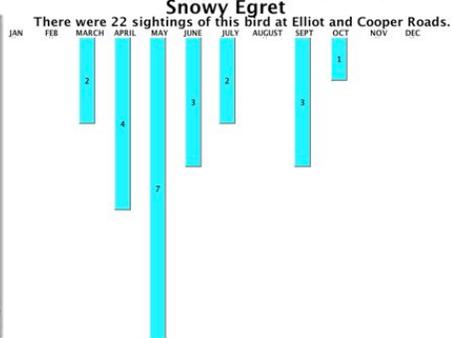
People sometimes possess less refined instincts toward personal protection. My father once told me that on a New England lake he had seen two boys in a boat with a captured great egret. The egret got away when it shoved its bill into one of the boys' nostrils.

SNOWY EGRET

1995-2003 Database: 17 Sightings



1995-2011 Database: 22 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				3	4	4	6		4						1	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The spike in May results from records in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002. It's surprising to see how seldom the bird has been seen at the site and how there has been but one sighting since the end of 2004. The snowy egret is quite common only a few miles away at Guadalupe and Greenfield Roads (the Water Ranch).

Other Sites to Try: The Water Ranch, Gilbert and Riggs Roads, Tempe Town Lake, Ayer Lake at Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Identification: Dark legs like the larger great egret's, but its beak is charcoal gray rather than yellow. The snowy egret's feet look as though the bird had just stepped into a pan of bright yellow paint.

Author's Notes:

I remember once making a hard slog out on the tidal flats of Estero Morua, Mexico to make the identification on this bird. The database reads:

Snowy Egret, 5/19/1998, Estero Morua, We had to walk well past the house at Stingray Bay to see this one. It was in a pool with some other birds. Apparently there was chow in the pool. Yellow feet, natch.

On the same trip, I saw a burrowing owl and recorded him in the database with a note:

Burrowing Owl, 05/19/1998, Generic Highway, This was a trip I took to Estero Morua Mexico just with Noodles. On the way down I wrote this note about a burrowing owl: This bird was on a post between Ak Chin and Pete's Corner. A coyote crossed the road.

For more than thirty-five years, the family has kept a log of all visits to our beach house and all birds seen. Part of the log book describes my walk to see the snowy egret:

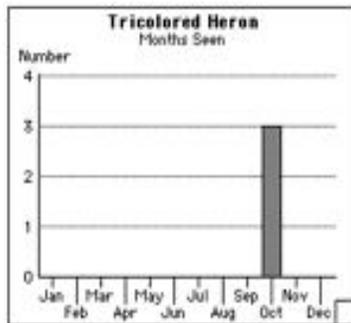
Slept about twelve hours last night. Eight to eight. Then got up and went bird watching. Noodles and I walked clean around the back and had to walk on the ice plants because the tide was high, a fact that didn't help with our bird watching; the shorebirds like the flats at low tide.

I met one Lupe, who said he was out all night every night guarding the houses. He asked about the price of my binocs. I told him \$300 and said he could get a cheaper pair—for thirty. He wanted me to bring him a thirty-dollar pair from the US and he'd pay. I guess I will bring them next time. He said he'd be working here for years.

I came back a few months later without any binoculars. I felt guilty, but not to fear; Lupe wasn't there, and I never saw him again.

TRICOLORED HERON

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
					3											

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

All of the sightings were in October of 2000: 10/08/2000, 10/21/2000, and 10/28/2000. Seen from the canal road in the northeast area of the site. Notes indicate it was immature.

Other Sites to Try: No other nearby records exist in the database for this bird.

Identification: This bird looks something like a green heron at first glance, but its neck is very much longer.

Author's Notes:

My first tricolored heron was on a trip in Mexico. I wrote:

The next day we headed into Progreso, a town right on the northern shore of Yucatan. This was a great place. We took a road by some mangrove swamps and pulled off onto the side of the road where big equipment was tearing up the place and in the process giving us plenty of room to park away from traffic. There was a tricolored heron out there and when I scanned the shore near us I said, "Hey! A Wilson's plover!" Larry was happy to see that bird. I know he'd seen it before down at my family's beach house, but he had forgotten. "Do you see that one down at the beach?" he asked. "Sure," I said.

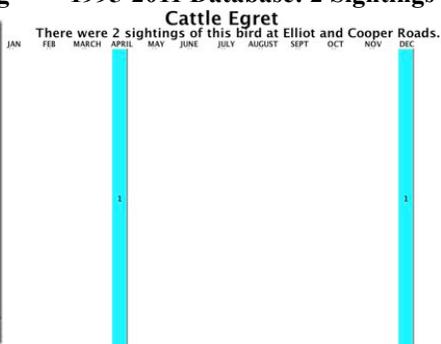
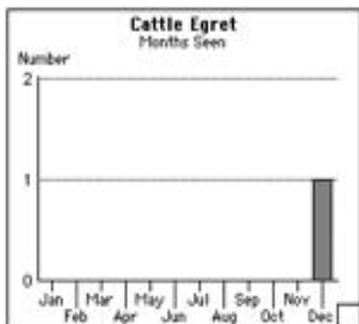
Notes for Elliot and Cooper Roads read:

Tricolored Heron, 10/8/2000, Elliot and Cooper Roads, Fantastic view of this critter. Noodles and I got to go inside and have a walk. It was nice and breezy and cool. Long neck. An immature.

CATTLE EGRET

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting

1995-2011 Database: 2 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1						1							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The cattle egret was sighted on 12/12/1998 and 4/18/2004. Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try: Ocotillo and Gilbert Roads. Has also been seen in the fields along Alma School Road south of Chandler Boulevard.

Identification: Smaller than the great egret and has a stouter, more hunched and awkward appearance than either the great egret or the snowy. Legs can be somewhat dark in immatures or pinkish in adults. The bill is yellow or pinkish in color. Adults have rusty patches on the head, breast, and back.

Author's Notes:

I have seen this introduced egret in large flocks on the plowed fields south of Elliot and Cooper Roads sometimes following

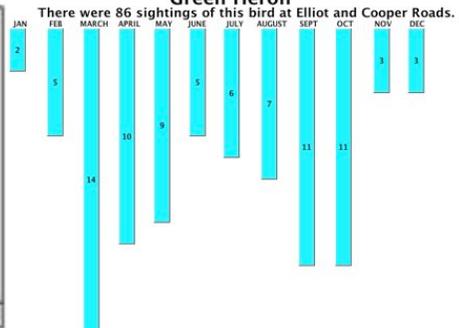
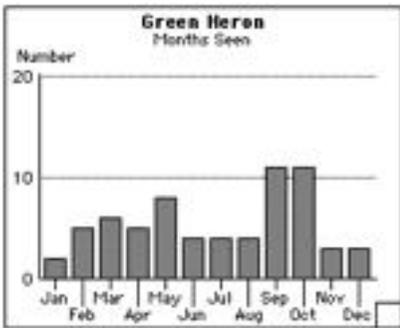
tractors plowing up the land. Once I stopped on Cooper Road to watch one. I attached this note to the bird in the database:

Cattle Egret, 02/28/1998, Generic Highway. It was eating a snake. Weird. Light bill yellowish and light legs chalky gray. About two and a half feet tall. It was in a kind of field in someone's shanty-type back yard. At Pecos and Cooper Roads.

GREEN HERON

1995-2003 Database: 66 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 86 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		11	28	12	6	6	2	9	4		1	3	1	2	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The bird was recorded with rather even regularity, especially in the first database

Other Sites to Try: The Water Ranch, Baseline and Power Roads, Gilbert and Riggs Road, Lake Ayer at Boyce Thompson Arboretum, the Verde River, the Phoenix Zoo.

Identification: This is the most common small heron at the site. Small size and dark appearance characterize the adult.

Author's Notes:

A memory of this favorite heron in Maine stays with me always. A shout and a glance, and I look to see the bird fly by—was it a culvert?— and across a road? The bird's determination was evident as he pumped his wings in the air to gain speed. There are three candidates for this memory in the database:

Green Heron, 6/12/1971, Maine Trip 1971

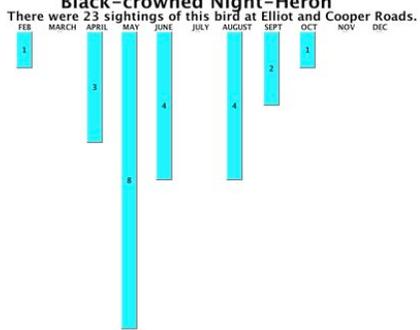
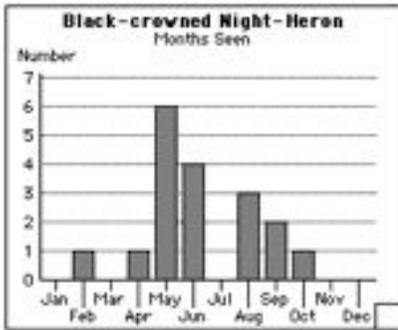
Green Heron, 6/14/1971, Maine Trip 1971, "In the morning my father pointed out a nice Green Heron."

Green Heron, 6/15/1971, Maine Trip 1971

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON

1995-2003 Database: 18 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 23 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			5	9	1	2	1		4		1					

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: General trend toward summer months.

Other Sites to Try:

Baseline and Power Roads in Northwest quadrant in the trees. Ayer Lake at Boyce Thompson Arboretum, the Phoenix Zoo, the Water Ranch, Tempe Town Lake.

Identification: Two-toned color of the adult is unlike any other heron's. Neck is very short as are the legs. Adult male and female look the same while immatures are buffy and streaked from head to tail.

Author's Notes:

The bird I remember perhaps most from my first real birding trip was the black-crowned night-heron. On April 17, 1971, I was 19 years old. That day we went to a place called Headlight Pond, so named by us because on the first trip there some young toughs bashed the headlights out of our Ford 490 V-8 station wagon. The pond was on the north side of the dry Salt River down a sandy road somewhere within the Mesa city limits. It was bordered by cottonwoods and reeds. Notes in the database say: "LOCATION: Pond between Mesa and Scottsdale."

Forty years have passed since my first visit there, and the last of just six database records at Headlight Pond is dated January 6, 1975. From time to time, I drive back out and look for the place. The landscape has changed so much with bulldozing and development that I'm not sure if Headlight Pond still exists, although there is one wet and wooded oasis out there that I feel could very well be a candidate. It's on the Pima Reservation, and there are signs there to keep out. I see a dried up lake on Google Earth and email the image to family members to see if they think it could be the place they remember. They don't know.

The pond may be gone, but one thing does remain from that time, and that is my bird list for the day. I input the data from an old notebook, and it is now available instantly from the database.

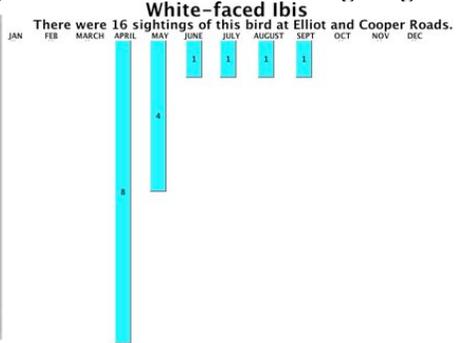
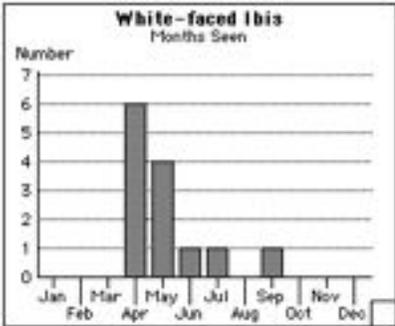
Headlight Pond
Saturday, April 17, 1971
 (An asterisk indicates a life lister.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Black-crowned Night-Heron*
2. Gambel's Quail
3. American Kestrel
4. Bald Eagle
5. Blue-winged Teal*
6. American Coot
7. Mourning Dove
8. Inca Dove
9. Rock Dove
10. Greater Roadrunner
11. Cassin's Kingbird* | 12. Cliff Swallow*
13. Northern Rough-winged Swallow*
14. Ruby-crowned Kinglet*
15. Yellow-rumped Warbler*
16. Yellow-headed Blackbird*
17. Western Meadowlark
18. House Sparrow
19. Great-tailed Grackle
20. Green-tailed Towhee*
21. Brewer's Sparrow*
22. White-crowned Sparrow* |
|--|---|

WHITE-FACED IBIS

1995-2003 Database: 13 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 16 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		1	3	1	1	4		3		1						2

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: April and May seem to be the best months. Often seen in large flocks flying in formation or wading in shallow water.

Other Sites to Try:

The database has records for this bird at the Water Ranch in April, May, August, and September.

Identification: A large bird dark and coppery red in color with a long, curved bill. Seldom seen alone. Travels in large flocks and feeds in flat, flooded areas.

Author's Notes:

The white-faced ibis is a great bird to be able to add to your backyard list even though it will never likely land there. Birds don't have to land to go on my backyard list, of course. As long as I see them from my backyard, they count.

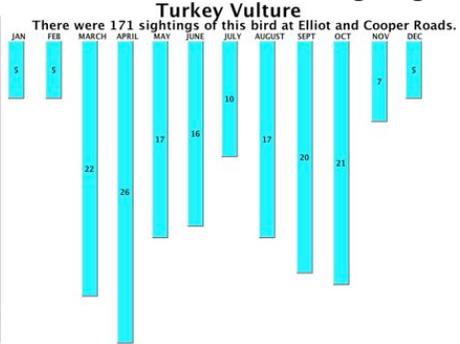
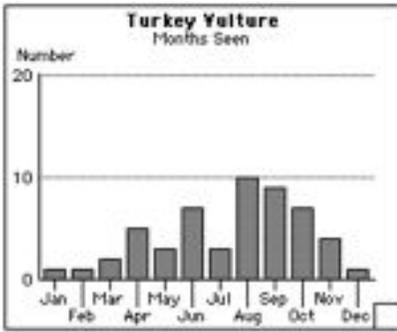
*White-faced Ibis, 4/11/1998, North Villas Lane, A
huge flock flying west in a large V and other shapes.*

Missing from the database is perhaps my favorite sighting of the white-faced ibis. It was on a field trip to Canyon Lake for the place I worked. There was a flock of birds flying in furious synchronization at the lake shore. Everyone was amazed at the speed of the flight and at how close the birds flew together and how they turned and changed direction at the same time as if sharing the same mind. It was only when they landed that I realized that these jet fighters were ibises. I search my journal but cannot find a date to use for the database. A shame.

TURKEY VULTURE

1995-2003 Database: 53 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 171 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		1	10	11	10	10	8	5	16	9	3	10	3	9	33	33

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Less common in winter months. Has been seen on the ground in the area feeding on dead water fowl. Also seen flying in flocks of forty or more over the site.

Other Sites to Try: Many records for Gilbert and Riggs Roads, the Water Ranch, Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Identification: V-shaped position of wings while soaring. From below, the outstretched wings have a two-toned, dark and light appearance and are tipped with finger-like feathers. Red, featherless head is dark in immatures.

Author's Notes:

I always record the turkey vulture with the simple abbreviation, "TV" in my notebook. The bird is a favorite of mine. It is nearly as big as an eagle and may hang over Elliot and Cooper Roads as if painted in the sky. My book says, "Feeding vultures are

soon joined by others flying in from beyond human vision." I find these words fascinating.

People are often surprised that the turkey vulture isn't in the hawk family; it's in the *Cathartidae* family, closer to cranes and flamingoes—closer, then, to my mind, to shorebirds, my favorites. (Witness where he is in this book—in taxonomic order between the white-faced ibis and the black-bellied whistling-duck). Hawks are in the *Accipitridae* family and Old World—not New World—vultures are hawks. Turkey Vultures are an instance of convergent evolution. They've evolved separately and similarly to fit similar conditions.

Perhaps this is why I have always liked the turkey buzzard more than hawks; it isn't really a hawk at all and instinctively perhaps I know it. It looks like an Old World vulture only because of convergent evolution—the same way *Ichthyosaurus*, an extinct sea-going reptile; the porpoise, a mammal; and the shark, a fish all have very similar body shapes. Convergent evolution, by the way, also accounts for how saber-toothed tigers once became completely extinct and re-evolved again later.

Turkey Vulture Society's website has fascinating facts about the bird and much of it is surprising. The bird eats far more vegetation than meat. Its excrement is sanitized and free of bacteria and viruses, and this allows the bird to keep the land clean. The turkey vulture is fond of taking good long baths. It is highly social and may devote the end of a day to speed soaring with friends. Turkey vultures roost in the same place for generations and will occasionally take a two-week vacation from the main roost and stay somewhere else. They communicate with other clans to tell them when there is an excess of carcasses in their area and at such times of plenty they play host to visiting vultures from other roosts.

The only other vulture you could even possibly see in Arizona is the black vulture, and then it would likely have to be down near the Mexican border. Try just south of Sonoita on the road to Puerto Peñasco. I've seen the black vulture there several times and was struck by how very different the bird looks as it soars.

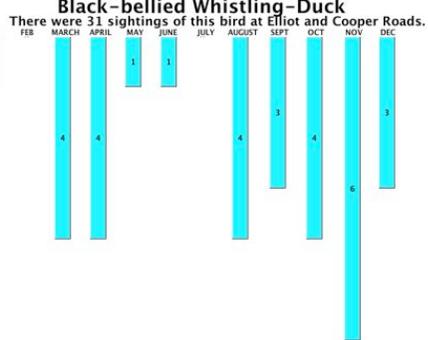
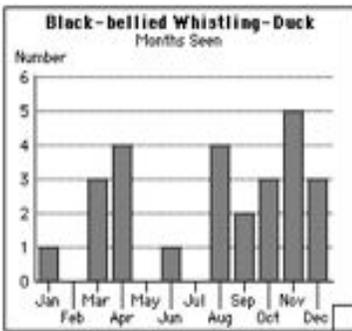
The Turkey Vulture Society doesn't seem as kindly disposed to the black vulture as they are to the turkey vulture. People even go so far as to say he's mean. One record of mine for the black vulture comes from my mother's journal entry on a trip we took throughout Mexico many years ago. I have added here the Wednesday, August 14, 1963 entry in my database for the black vulture.

Black Vulture, 08/14/1963, Generic Highway, Mom wrote: "...we drove three hours before pulling into Acapulco. Shortly before we got there we hit a large buzzard luckily not through the windshield but it knocked off our windshield wiper." How well I remember this. Steve and I went out and found the poor creature still alive. It hissed at us.

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK

1995-2003 Database: 26 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 31 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	2	2	14	5	3	0	0	2	2		1					

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Lack of water at the site may account for the small number in later years. This will be true for other ducks.

Other Sites to Try:

On 4/19/1998 a number of these birds were seen at Ocotillo and Gilbert Roads, but the pond there is now covered with new houses. One record in the database also exists for this bird in Patagonia, Arizona at the Nature Conservancy site.

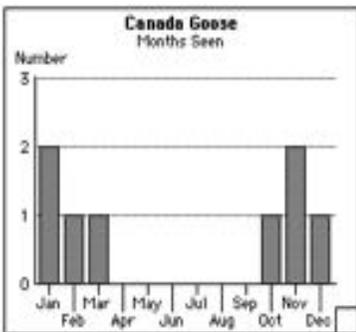
Identification: Look for the upright posture and the goose-like appearance of this large tree duck. Large white patch on the shoulder is also visible in flight on the top of the wing.

Author's Notes:

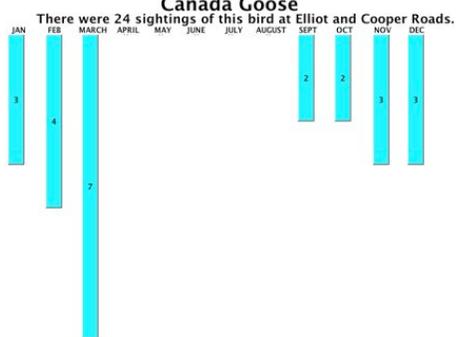
The whistling-duck's nationality is basically Mexican. It's a goose-like tree duck with long legs and is rare in Arizona except in a few places. I'm following the official spelling by the way, with the hyphen that confuses one's sorting in the database. When you want to sort this species with the ducks, you'll find it misplaced in the list next to "Whistler's Mother" or some such heading instead.

CANADA GOOSE

1995-2003 Database: 8 Sightings



1995-2011 Database: 24 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			3		4		1		4	1		3		4	4	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Missing from April to August.

Other Sites to Try: Can be seen occasionally flying over residential areas in fairly large flocks. Three sightings 1971, 1972, and 1973 in the database at the Phoenix Zoo.

Identification: The white cheek patch on this bird is one of its most obvious field marks. The neck is black. This goose is usually quite large but there is a mallard-sized race that has been split into its own separate species. It is called the cackling goose.

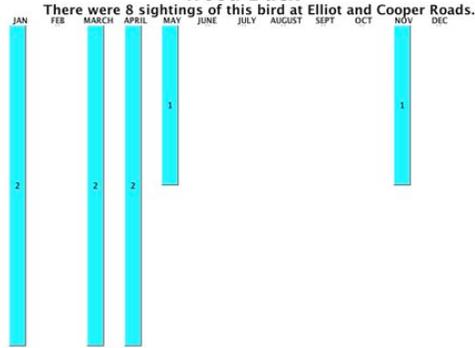
Author's Notes:

In 1980, I was flying a Cessna 150 over Texas when about ten huge Canada geese flashed under my left wing. I wondered what would have happened if they had hit the prop. Pilot folk wisdom had it that if you broke the prop, there would be such an imbalance that if you didn't throttle down instantly, the engine would be yanked out of the plane and you would go into a deadly flat spin straight to the ground. Luckily, I never found out, and none of my other encounters with the Canada goose has been at all scary except for when one bit my father at the Phoenix Zoo on December 18, 1971. One memory from the database reads:

Canada Goose, 07/17/1998, San Juan River, Wow there was honkin' early in the mornin' that woke us up. One honking goose seemed sick and kind of crash landed on a sandy bank.

WOOD DUCK

1995-2011 Database: 8 Sightings
Wood Duck



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
									5			1	2			

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not seen for as many as nine years in a row. Uncommon.

Other Sites to Try: I have three records for the Phoenix Zoo, but other than at Elliot and Cooper Roads, I have no other local sightings.

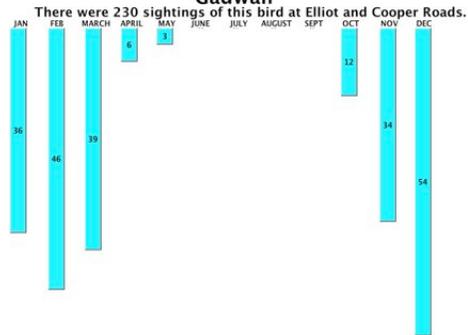
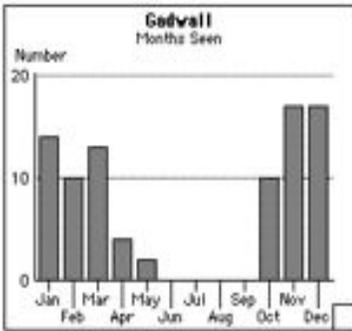
Identification: The white teardrop eye ring on the plainer female helps to identify this duck. The male is spectacularly colored with bold facial markings in white and black and an iridescent green, crested head.

Author's Notes:

This is often said to be the most beautiful of all ducks. I have seen them in ponds 1, 7, and 8 and have sightings with both male and female present.

GADWALL

1995-2003 Database: 87 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 230 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	4		22	22	18	11	9	12	26	22		13	8	8	33	22

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Summer months are poor for sighting this bird.

Other Sites to Try: This is perhaps the best area in the database to see the gadwall. In 2002, there was only one other site with a record in the database for the gadwall. The bird was seen at the Phoenix Zoo on March 20, 1998. The new database, however, has numerous sightings at Tempe Town Lake, the Water Ranch, and Higley and Ocotillo Roads.

Identification: The head of this brownish duck is somewhat flat on the top giving it a distinctive profile. Look for dark feathers just below the tail of the bird while it is swimming.

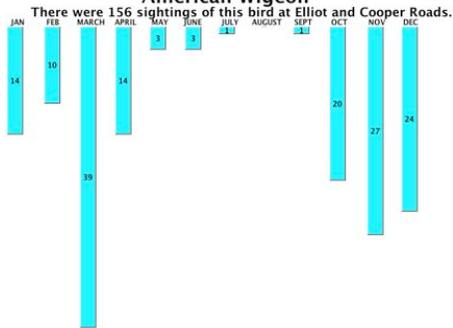
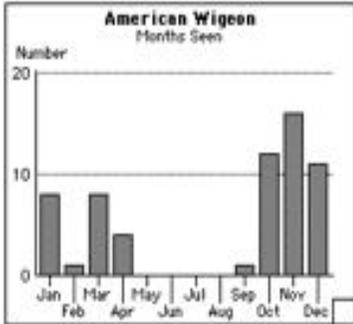
Author's Notes:

This is one of those birds whose beauty is in simplicity. The color of the gadwall is grayish and brownish and that seems to be

enough adornment for the bird. I always think of hunting when I think of this bird as it looks (to me at least) like the kind of duck that would be featured on the cover of *Field and Stream* or *Outdoor Life*.

AMERICAN WIGEON

1995-2003 Database: 61 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 156 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	2		16	15	13	4	11	4	33	8	1	13	4	19	12	1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Mostly missing in the summer months.

Other Sites to Try:

The database has records for this bird at Gilbert and Riggs Roads, the Water Ranch, the Phoenix Zoo, and Baseline and Power Roads, and there have been a surprising number at the pond behind the Dobson Ranch branch of the Mesa Public Library.

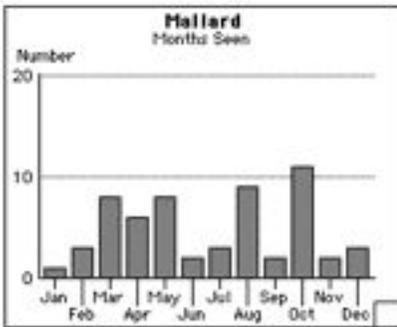
Identification: Look for the white crown on the male's head and the green area surrounding the eye. The bill of the male and female is light blue.

Author's Notes:

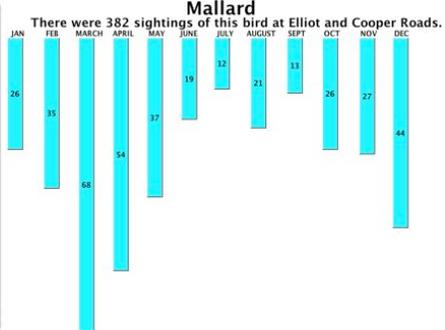
Blur your eyes and the wigeon will turn into a gadwall for a moment. So many of the ducks seem to be mosaics of each other. Compare the shoveler and the mallard and it seems that their various features came in a box and the birds were assembled using many of the same parts: green head, orange feet, etc.—the way you make Mr. Potato Head from the box of plastic features. The various teals, of course, have many similar features and this adds to the feeling one occasionally gets that some ducks are just different races of the same species.

MALLARD

1995-2003 Database: 58 Sightings



1995-2011 Database: 382 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		19	17	11	4	4	13	71	40	11	28	12	36	51	64

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Such a common bird that it has not been recorded diligently. Thus the data in the chart is in question. The chart does indicate that one could expect to see this bird most of the year at the site.

Other Sites to Try: Most any pond anywhere.

Identification: The male of this large, well-known duck has a green head and a dark breast, and is white below. The male also has a strange curl of feathers near the rump. Look for it. The female is rather uniformly brown and mottled. Listen for the Donald Duck-style *quack! quack! quack! quack! quack!* of this species.

Author's Notes:

The mallard is said to hybridize with other species, and I have seen some evidence of that at Elliot and Cooper Roads. My old commercial database did not allow records for nameless hybrids like mallard crosses. In fact, it had no way to record famous and sought-after hybrids like the Lawrence's warbler, a cross between a golden-winged warbler and a blue-winged warbler. However, as explained earlier, I can record such birds because in my database it is possible to enter a bird whose species is undetermined as a *generic* of that group. That way, if I have a memorable sighting of a swallow flying high in the sky, I can record it as "Generic Swallow" even if I can't quite determine the exact species. I have always clicked on "Generic Duck" to record any birds I thought might be mallard hybrids:

***Generic Duck**, 02/02/2002, Elliot and Cooper Roads, A very strange duck. Rather pintail-like but very dark. Yellowish and sleek. White breast. Three yellow, sharp bars on the right side. On the left one yellowish spot. Another birdwatcher and I looked at it. Perhaps it's a hybrid.*

***Generic Duck**, 05/05/2002, Elliot and Cooper Roads, This looked to be a HYBRID of some sort perhaps between a mallard and a pintail. It had babies following it, though.*

Generic Duck,05/26/2002,*Elliot and Cooper Roads, This seems to be the very same duck I saw on February 2 2002. It is a dark—almost black duck with a white breast. I didn't see the little chevrons that I recorded before however. Its bill is black too.*

The generic option in the database can be even less specific than “Generic Swallow” or “Generic duck;” I found it necessary to create a "Generic Bird" as a part of the database to cover sightings such as the following:

Generic Bird,05/24/1981,*Estero Morua, There's a flock of unrecognizable birds (big ones) which strings out then crashes together again and again. The islands changed from pyramids to peaks.*

Generic Bird,05/05/2003,*North Villas Lane, This is the mysterious bird that calls at 4:00 in the morning. I recorded him this morning! I walked across the street and he was also calling from the neighbor's tree.*

With regard to the North Villas Lane record, I finally found the call in my Roger Tory Peterson Western Birds CD. The bird was a western kingbird, which has the strange "dawn song" that I thought was so mysterious and interesting.

One wouldn't think you could get less specific than Generic Bird, but what if you didn't see any at all? The database has a Generic No Bird choice as well for when you want to record a trip and write a journal entry but you saw no birds:

Generic No Bird,08/08/2004,*Strawberry Arizona, Stopped at that place where we stayed before but there were no birds! Oh it was the Strawberry Lodge.*

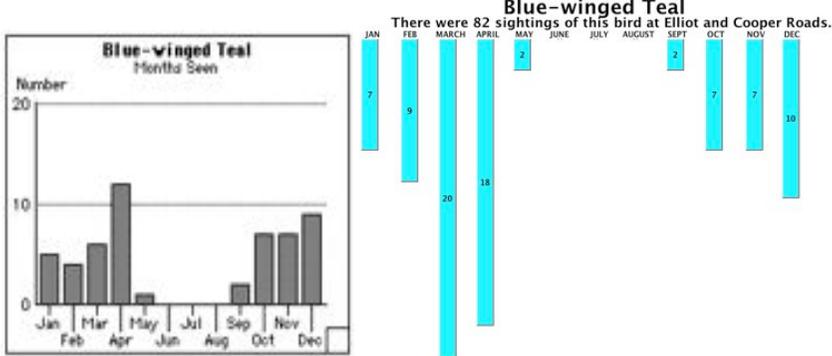
Or you didn't feel like bird watching that day:

Generic No Bird, 04/21/2005, North Villas Lane, Today was a very sad day because Noodles died.

The “generic” feature must be useful. I ran a quick filter through the thousands of birds in the database and found that although I had used it just 55 times for Elliot and Cooper Roads, there are, all told, a whopping 814 generic birds in the database.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL

1995-2003 Database: 53 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 82 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		19	16	10	1	6		7	7		8		7		

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: June, July, and August are clearly not the best months to see this bird. Compared to other common ducks in this database, the blue-winged teal is less frequently seen. Seen in every area of the site. Never appears in very large numbers.

Other Sites to Try: Five sightings at the Water Ranch.

Identification: The crescent-shaped white patch on the male's cheek is an easy field mark. Top and leading edge of the wing in flight is sky blue.

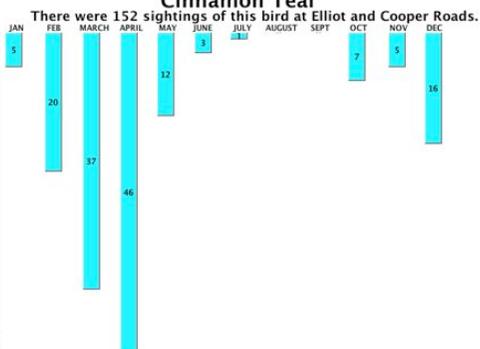
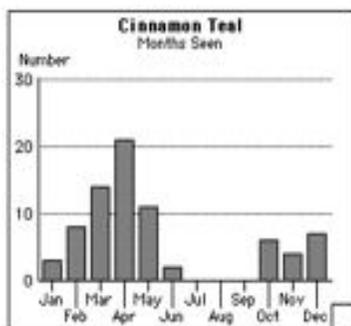
Author's Notes:

I have occasionally run into a Tempe Parks and Recreation birding class at Elliot and Cooper Roads. The teacher has often been kind enough to invite me to tag along with them as they sought out local birds. I remember on one such occasion driving down the canal road (Cooper Road Trail Crossing). One of the new birders in a car ahead of me stopped and waved me to a stop to show me some blue-winged teals in one of the ponds.

Blue-winged Teal, 3/14/1998, Elliot and Cooper Roads, They were along the road on the north. Another birdwatcher motioned to me and I got out of my car to see these birds.

CINNAMON TEAL

1995-2003 Database: 76 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 152 Sightings
 Cinnamon Teal



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1	1	13	22	14	13	10	5	21	20	1	8	1	4	5	13

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Common but missing most of the summer. Cinnamon teals seem either to be absent or present in good numbers at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

Other Sites to Try: Records exist for Gilbert and Riggs Roads and the Water Ranch.

Identification: The dark copper color of the male confirms this species. In flight, the wings are somewhat like the blue-winged teal's with the blue leading edge.

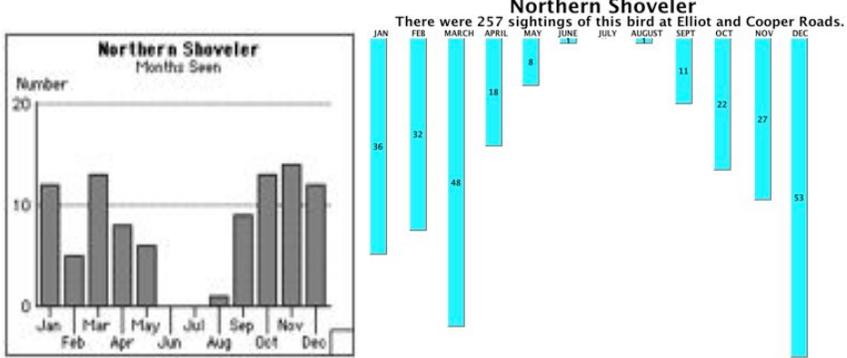
Author's Notes:

The cinnamon teal brings to mind a single sighting at the northeast corner of S. Airport Boulevard and E. Queen Creek Road, where I would sometimes go to see the burrowing owls that live along the sandy shoulders of the boulevard. There is a depressed area at the intersection that holds water and is known to bird watchers. It is at the end of the runway at Chandler Airport. There was a cinnamon teal there I remember. In later visits, I found the area dry, and this particular site may offer an excellent small project for someone who would like to look into preserving it and seeing that a measure of any irrigation near the area be diverted into it. There are a number of places that I think should be looked into for preservation and even improvement rather than development, but some of them are destined to become places that no longer exist.

NORTHERN SHOVELER

1995-2003 Database: 93 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 257 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1	1	24	23	23	13	7	10	45	24	2	18	6	12	37	11

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Very common duck at the site. Mostly gone in the summer.

Other Sites to Try: Records for this bird exist in the database for the Phoenix Zoo, the Water Ranch, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Chandler Sewage Ponds near the Maricopa Road freeway exit, and Baseline and Power Roads.

Identification: Large spatula-shaped beak and white breast of the male makes identification easy. The head is green like the mallard's.

Author's Notes:

The shoveler has a look that will make you smile despite yourself, but you need to know what to look for. Of course, the

shoveler bill is something to see, but that is not what will make you laugh. It is the eyes. The bird has a fairly large head with yellow eyes with tiny, perfectly centered pupils that give the creature a loony, comical appearance at once pathetic and *simpático* at the same time.

One of my earliest memories of bird watching was the time I chanced upon a northern shoveler in the heat of an Arizona afternoon. The place and date are not clear to me, but I believe it was in the early seventies, I think in the dry bed of the Salt River, and I can look for it in the database. There was a pool, I remember, a tiny pool of water so meager and concealed by its own insignificance that the bird had it all to himself. And so there he floated as he knew he, a duck, was meant to do, accepting this destitution—and content with it. The only records in the database that could match this sighting are:

Northern Shoveler, 10/23/1971, Phoenix Sewer Flats

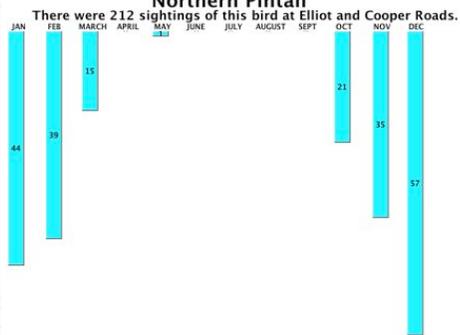
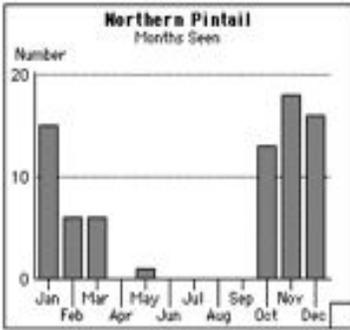
Northern Shoveler, 10/24/1971, Mesa Sewer Flats

But the Phoenix Sewer Flats were not on the Salt River bed as I recall, and therefore I'm choosing the October 24 date as the authentic one. It can be very hot in October here, so the record could still match my memory of the heat.

NORTHERN PINTAIL

1995-2003 Database: 75 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 212 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		18	22	19	13	2	7	27	13		13	6	15	33	23

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Common. Mostly missing April to September or half the year. Seen only twice in the 78 visits in 2002 and not at all in the 35 visits made in 2006. Birds such as the blue-winged teal also are missing from years, but they are less common than the pintail so the absence of records doesn't say very much. The pintail, however, is quite common, and people have said the bird took a different flyway and wasn't seen because of that. Records for the years 2007-2011 seem to show that the bird is back to its usual migratory route which includes stops at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

Other Sites to Try:

Records for this bird exist in the database for the Phoenix Zoo, the Water Ranch, and Baseline and Power Roads.

Identification: Rather large and sleek. The male of this species has a white breast with a thin finger of white extending all the way up the side of the head. This is a good field mark on the male. Look for the pointed tail of the male.

Author's Notes:

Some notes attached to the bird.

Northern Pintail, 1/1/2011, Elliot and Cooper Roads, In cold water of Pond 8. Edges frozen!

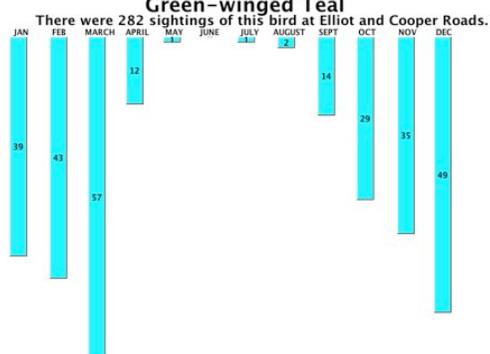
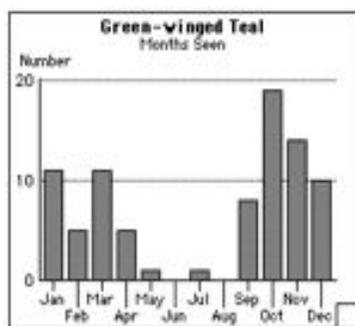
Northern Pintail, 12/14/2010, Elliot and Cooper Roads, Flying over. He circled and came in for a landing. There were other pintails in the pond where he landed (Pond 8) and there wasn't much water there.

Northern Pintail, 6/25/2010, Greenfield and Guadalupe Roads, A rogue duck lying there like a decoy.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL

1995-2003 Database: 85 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 282 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		27	20	19	10	7	13	40	24	2	19	9	26	36	29

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Summer months far less frequently seen.

Other Sites to Try: The Water Ranch and the Phoenix Zoo.

Identification: Small in size. Look for the green patch surrounding the eye and the red or copper-colored head of the male. The male also has a short vertical white stripe extending up the shoulder. Emerald wing patch visible in flight.

Author's Notes:

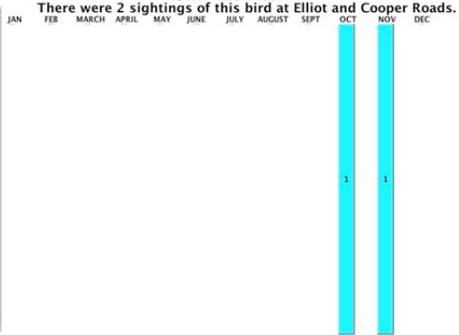
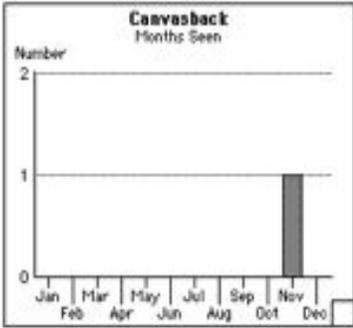
My Swift Audubon binoculars, they say, have multi-coated lenses. All I know is that they are green. As you look through the binoculars, you will often get a most beautiful glint in the eyepiece, an emerald spark which is most decidedly agreeable! This emerald is the same color as the speculum of the green-winged teal. The bird is one of the most common ducks at the site with only the perennial mallard outnumbering it in the database.

This is one of the smallest ducks out there and when September comes along, you will see the grayish birds with winter plumage. It is then that you can look to see the green speculum and feel somewhat confident of your identification. I have few adventures to report for the green-winged teal, however. In fact, of the 85 sightings recorded in the 2003 database, not a single one has a note attached to it.

CANVASBACK

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting

1995-2011 Database: 2 Sightings
Canvasback



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1								1					

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try: The database has records for February, March, and April for this bird at Gilbert and Riggs Roads. Divers like this like deeper water than what is usually available at Elliot and Cooper Roads. When Pond 8 is full, it is deep enough for these ducks.

Identification: The canvasback is a red-headed duck that has a whitish body (including the back). The breast is black in the male as is the beak, and the head is angular in appearance as opposed to rounded as in the redhead.

Author's Notes:

I have only a few of these birds recorded. A better place for the canvasback is in the deeper water of the ponds at Gilbert and Riggs

Roads. I have it recorded there four times in only 20 visits compared to just twice at Elliot and Cooper Roads in 1063 visits.

My journal after a trip to Gilbert and Riggs Roads tells of one such canvasback sighting and also records my desire to make a good database for bird listing and some of the first steps I considered.

March 1, 1998 Noodles and I went to Cooper and Elliot Roads and saw birds. We also went to Riggs and Gilbert Roads and saw a new pond with canvasbacks and redheads that like deeper water, being diving ducks as they are. Larry knows all about that place. Also went to the little "pond" at McQueen and Queencreek and saw some birds.

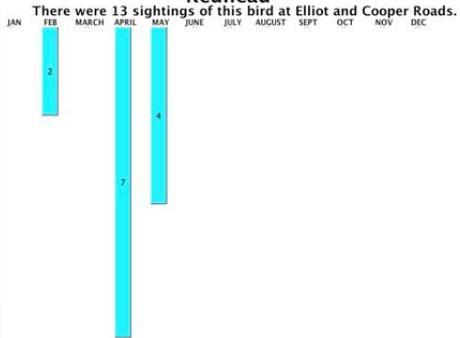
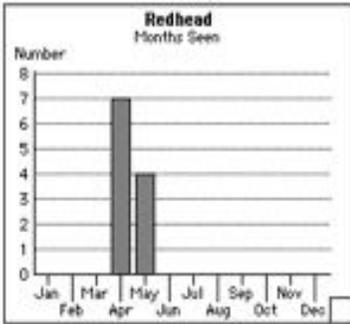
I want to make a database for birdwatching, 'cause I think I can do a better job, so I bought Microsoft's Visual FoxPro and I think it might be a dog. Note: it is! I just bought FileMakerPro for the Mac. I have a book to help me and it's not hard. They have a runtime version you can make and it costs fifteen hundred dollars and will convert both Mac and Windows versions so you can distribute and make a million.

As mentioned in the Introduction, I finally opted to use HyperCard to make my first homemade database for birds. I left the rather pricey FileMaker program on my computer and never really got back to it. FoxPro cost a penny as well, and I kicked myself because I foolishly bought it after someone reviewed it Online saying, "Once again Microsoft has created a product that is virtually unusable. Stay far away."

REDHEAD

1995-2003 Database: 11 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 13 Sightings
Redhead



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
						8	3			2						

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: This species is much less common than most other ducks at the site. Divers like this like deeper water than what is usually available at Elliot and Cooper Roads. When Pond 8 is full, it is deep enough for these ducks.

Other Sites to Try: The database has records for Ayer Lake at Boyce Thompson Arboretum in February and March. Also Gilbert and Riggs Roads in February, March, and April. I have a Montezuma Well sighting in March of 1975 and recent January and May sightings at Higley and Ocotillo Roads and the Water Ranch respectively.

Identification: The redhead is darker on the back than the canvasback and has a light, black-tipped bill. Head is round in profile unlike the canvasback's, which is rather angular.

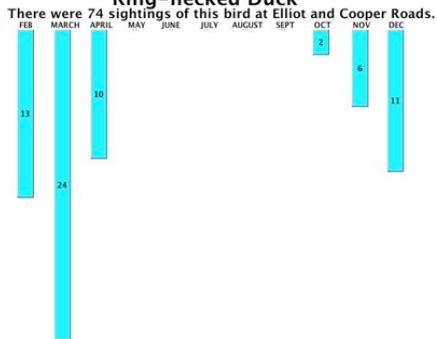
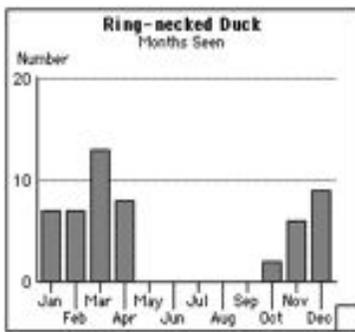
Author's Notes:

I once met someone at Elliot and Cooper Roads who swore that redheads were very common at the site, and he had seen them a million times there. I protested a bit but gave it up when he wouldn't relent. It was only a little later that I realized this person had likely been mistaking the common green-winged teal for the redhead. The male teal's head is rather red. I have only 29 sightings of the redhead in the entire database for all sites.

RING-NECKED DUCK

1995-2003 Database: 52 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 74 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		16	14	7	7	7		7	12		2	1			

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: No records for May through September.

Other Sites to Try:

An excellent site for the ring-necked duck is the pond behind Macayo's Restaurant on the northwest corner of Dobson and Baseline. Also seen frequently at Boyce Thompson Arboretum, at the Water Ranch, at Baseline and Power Roads, at the Phoenix Zoo, and behind the Dobson Branch of the Mesa Library.

Identification: Everyone says it should be called the ring-billed duck; look for the white ring around the bill of this small, stubby diving duck. The male's head is dark and purplish and contrasts sharply with the darker breast. The back is darker than that of the very similar lesser scaup.

Author's Notes:

The sight of the pond behind Macayo's Restaurant on the corner of Dobson and Baseline has a somewhat eerie quality for me. For many years, I have driven home from work at dusk or early evening and have seen through my car window in the twilight or by the light of the moon the still shapes of ring-necked ducks sleeping in the same area of dark water. The image of them all sleeping there in the gloom, evening after evening, year after year, has given me the impression of looking into some ghostly duck mausoleum.

LESSER SCAUP

1995-2011 Database: 2 Sightings

Lesser Scaup

There were 2 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

JAN FEB MARCH APRIL MAY JUNE JULY AUGUST SEPT OCT NOV DEC



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
									2							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Seen only twice and in November of 2004 both times.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch, the pond behind the Dobson branch of the Mesa Library, and the Research Park.

Identification: Looks a great deal like the ring-necked duck, but has a lighter back.

Author's Notes:

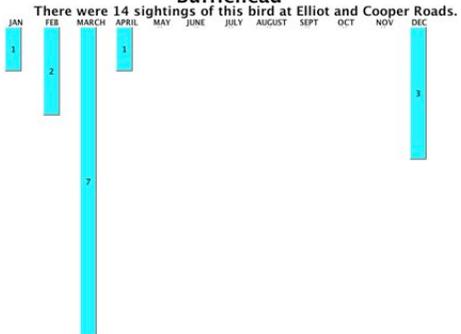
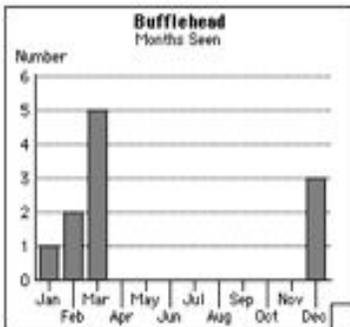
On the occasion of the following record, I remember that there were ring-necked ducks at the site as well, but the pair of lessers stayed away from them. I also learn from the journal entry that I arrived that Saturday and “the doggoned library” was closed for New Year’s Day.

Lesser Scaup, 1/1/2011, Mesa Library Pond at Dobson Ranch, Apart from the other ring-necks. White scalloped backs. Two of them. One dove to get away from me.

BUFFLEHEAD

1995-2003 Database: 11 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 14 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	2		9						2			1				

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: An uncommon duck at the site. The bufflehead has been missing at the site for as long as five years. Seen from the observation area behind the fire station in Pond 8. Both male and female recorded. The male was always particularly bright white in color.

Other Sites to Try: The database contains one record of a female bufflehead at the Water Ranch in March of 2003 and one record at Gilbert and Riggs Roads in April of 1998. There is also a March 1975 sighting at Montezuma Well.

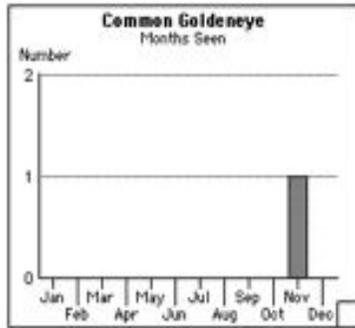
Identification: Bill is small and very short. Male is blindingly white with a large white eye patch surrounded by darker, iridescent feathers. Female has a dark, grayish head and back above a lighter body. A small white oval spot on the cheek of the female is also an excellent field mark.

Author's Notes:

The bufflehead is a diving sea duck that stopped in to visit a few times at Elliot and Cooper Roads. The male is snow white—blindingly white. It spends so much time underwater that you'll see him surface and you'll say, "There he is!" to which someone says, "Where?" and you say, "Over there—oh, but he dived again!" A minute later someone says, "There he is!" and you say "Where?" and they say... Well, you get the idea.

COMMON GOLDENEYE

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
							1									

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Individual seen was a female diving in the main pond behind the fire station in Pond 8.

Other Sites to Try: Seen at Higley and Ocotillo Roads on January 5, 2008 and at the Kokopelli Golf Course near Elliot and Cooper Roads on December 15, 2010.

Identification: Look for a small beak like the bufflehead's on this bird. A small white spot on the cheek of the male is located just below the eye. The male's head is dark green and there are white streaks that stretch from shoulder to tail against the black upper part of the bird. The female's head is uniformly rusty brown, darker than the rest of its body.

Author's Notes:

My first goldeneye was seen on March 19, 2000 in Vancouver, BC. I saw the Barrow's goldeneye on that day as well. I thought at the time how exotic these birds were, but the Elliot and Cooper

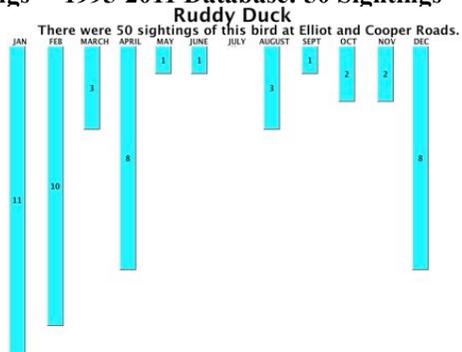
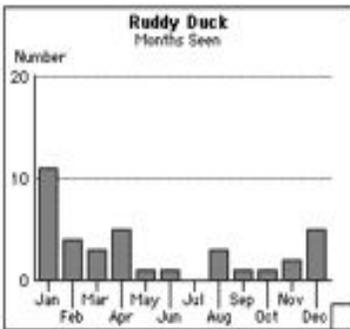
Roads site makes it possible to see exotic birds without traveling that far. My database notes read:

Common Goldeneye, 11/02/2002, Elliot and Cooper Roads, A place life lister. I thought he was a redhead but he had a white breast and a white collar and a short weird bill. Prehistoric-looking. Dove a lot. Female.

RUDDY DUCK

1995-2003 Database: 37 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 50 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1	1	7	22	2		2	2	4	6		3				

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Less frequently seen than even the blue-winged teal at the site. Was often seen sleeping in the ponds behind the fire station.

Other Sites to Try:

Records exist for the bird at Gilbert and Riggs Roads, the Water Ranch, the Phoenix Zoo, Tempe Town Lake, Higley and Ocotillo Roads, and the Kokopelli Golf Course near Elliot and Cooper Roads.

Identification: Look for a stubby, short bird on the water with tail feathers sticking straight up. Look also for a very large white cheek patch and a bluish beak. In the summer, the male is strikingly colorful with its bright blue beak and coppery feathers.

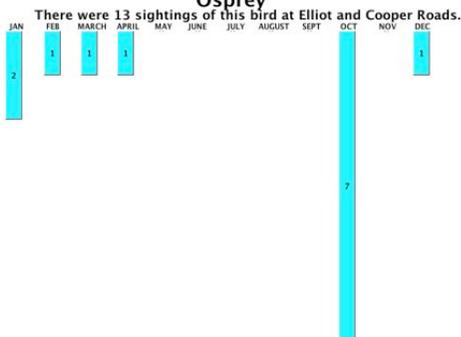
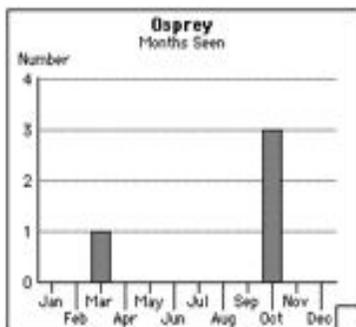
Author's Notes:

I remember a visitor at the site saying, "Hey, that's a ruddy duck," and then, "I wonder if they're nocturnal. They're always sleeping." I went home and typed "ruddy duck nocturnal" into Google and learned that the visitor was right. A University of Michigan website told how the birds are generally nocturnal and how they stick their bills into their feathers and tuck their feet underneath their bodies when they sleep so they are shaped like little balls—and if a strong wind comes up, they may roll across the lake!

OSPREY

1995-2003 Database: 4 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 13 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
					3		1		3			1		2	2	1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Uncommon at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch, Higley and Ocotillo Roads, and Tempe Town Lake.

Identification: Look for the crook in the wing of the osprey as it soars and the black patches at the "wrist." Tail is banded and underparts are streaked black and white.

Author's Notes:

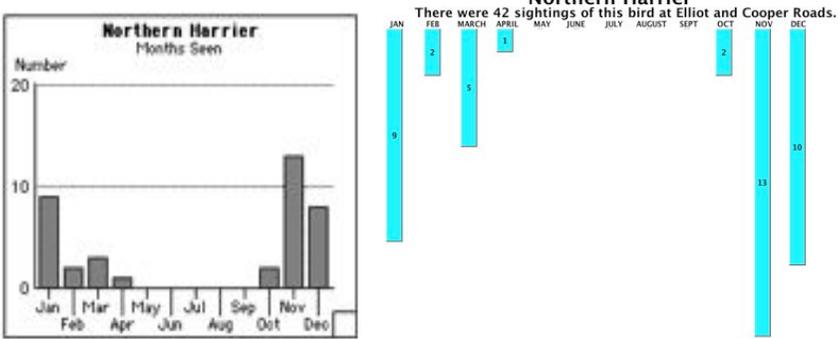
The osprey is of a monotypic family. That is, he is the only bird in his family, *Pandionidae*. An only child.

At Estero Morua, Mexico, behind our beach house used to stand tall poles supported by two-by-four buttresses. On the top of each pole was a rebar hook upon which ospreys would alight. It was said that whenever an osprey landed on a pole, it was José Espinoza's spirit returning to earth.

José was the famed owner of the land there who once pulled a pistol on a homeowner and banished him permanently from the premises for drinking too much. There was no discussion about the homeowner's exile; the man never dared return to his beach house until José dropped dead of a heart attack while running off some people in a sand buggy who were driving over the dunes. José's grave is on the road to the estuary, but a change in geography has made the area too prone to the flooding of the high tides to drive anymore. Perhaps that is for the best, however—at least for José's ghost; his grave was something akin to the only tree in a flat sandy plain, and tired beer drinking drivers used to stop at his grave and use it as beer drinkers might use any tree.

NORTHERN HARRIER

1995-2003 Database: 38 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 42 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		1	10	17	7	1	2					1	1	2		

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Absent May through September. Water fowl seem afraid of the harrier here.

Other Sites to Try: Records exist in the database for the Water Ranch, Tempe Town Lake, Higley and Ocotillo Roads, and Baseline and Power Roads.

Identification: White rump very evident during flight. Flight is generally low and slow. Tail is banded. Sexes are quite different in color, the male being gray and the female brown. White upper tail feathers of the Harris's hawk can give the impression of a white rump like the Harrier's.

Author's Notes:

The harrier seems to defy gravity as it soars at low speed and low altitude over the bushes and fields in search of prey. I found a dead jackrabbit at Elliot and Cooper Roads once with its side half

devoured. I always thought it was the work of the northern harrier. I put the rabbit's picture on my website with a playful caption.



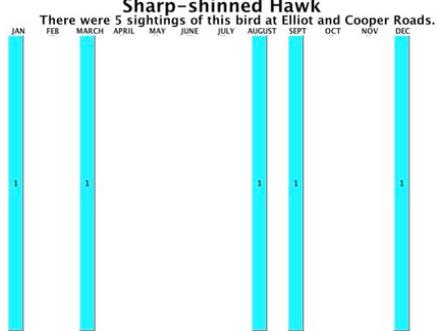
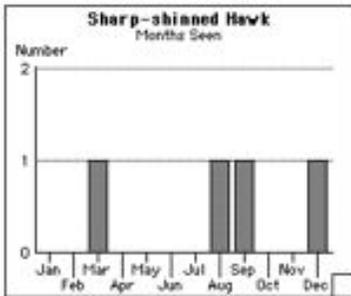
The Harrier's Hapless Prey

That northern harrier (marsh hawk) seems to have finally gotten dinner. This poor creature was on the menu. Seems he was a kind of "side dish" because the hawk ate his side. Get it? Yuck yuck yuck. January 1999 picture.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

1995-2003 Database: 4 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 5 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			2	2												1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Seen sporadically. Uncommon at the site.

Other Sites to Try: Records exist for McQueen and Elliot Roads, the Water Ranch, and the Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Identification: The sharp-shinned hawk is a light-colored hawk with yellow legs and red scalloping on the breast. Its banded tail is narrow and square rather than rounded at the tip like the white-tipped tail of the very similar but larger Cooper's hawk.

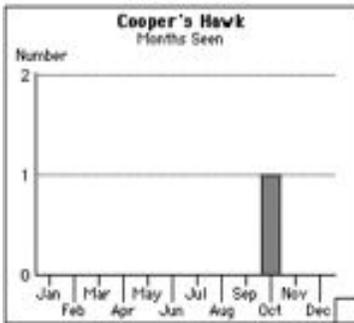
Author's Notes:

I have not seen very many sharp-shinneds. (There are only 15 recorded in the whole database.) My first sighting seems like only yesterday despite the time that has passed:

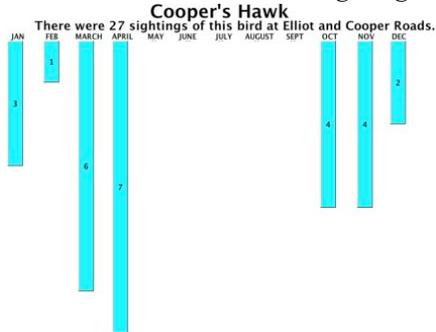
Sharp-shinned Hawk, 09/17/1971, Flagstaff Area, This is outside of Flagstaff actually. There were two posts perhaps fifty feet apart and they flew from one to the other. There appeared to be the remains of their prey on the posts. Not any snow on the mountain.

COOPER'S HAWK

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



1995-2011 Database: 27 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1					2	1			3	1	1	3	15

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: This bird has become somewhat more common over the years at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

Records exist in the database for Baseline and Power Roads, Gilbert and Riggs Roads, and the Verde River.

Identification: It is very much like the sharp-shinned hawk. The Cooper's hawk is also known as the "chicken hawk." It's larger than its very similar cousin and with a rounded, white-tipped tail and a larger, more rounded head. Look for yellow legs and red scalloping on the breast to begin identification of this bird.

Author's Notes:

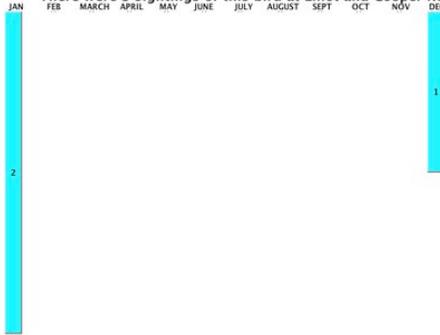
I looked through my binoculars at Elliot and Cooper Roads and said, "There's a red-tailed hawk." to which my nephew said, "What? It's a big accipiter—a Cooper's hawk." I was surprised because I thought my nephew was a good enough birder to tell the difference between an accipiter and a buteo. "It's a red tail, bird brain," I told him, and then we put down our binoculars to find that we had been looking at two different hawks flying over the same dry pond at the same time.

HARRIS'S HAWK

1995-2011 Database: 3 Sightings

Harris's Hawk

There were 3 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
										1		1	1			

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site. Seems to like the winter.

Other Sites to Try:

I have only 21 records for all sites in the database. I have seen it at the Verde River, the Superstition Mountains, and the Phoenix Zoo.

Identification: This is a dark hawk. The yellow beak seems to me to be obvious even from a distance. The bird has a white tip on the tail and white feathers on and near the rump which make it look like the white-rumped northern harrier. Its legs and shoulders are rufous.

Author's Notes:

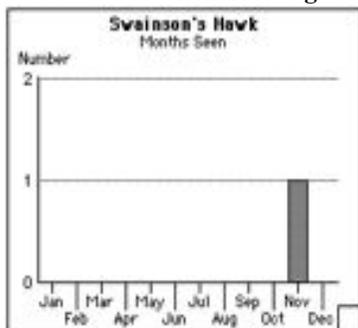
I have two records in which I note that it is soaring with another species, one with a northern harrier and another with a red-tailed hawk.

Harris's Hawk, 06/20/2002, Phoenix Zoo, This bird was so tame that I thought it must have rabies or something and it would attack me. Walked right up to it. Finally it flew away revealing its whitish "band" at the base of the tail.

Yes, I know that birds don't get rabies.

SWAINSON'S HAWK

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				1												

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try: A Swainson's on April 24, 1999 at Gilbert and Riggs Roads is the only nearby sighting recorded. I ran into a well known local birder there, and he and I agreed on the identification.

Identification: The immature red-tailed hawk is easily mistaken for this hawk. Look for a dark breast on the Swainson's hawk without the dark ragged band on the belly. Its banded tail is somewhat similar to the immature red-tail hawk's which may lack the obvious band on the belly.

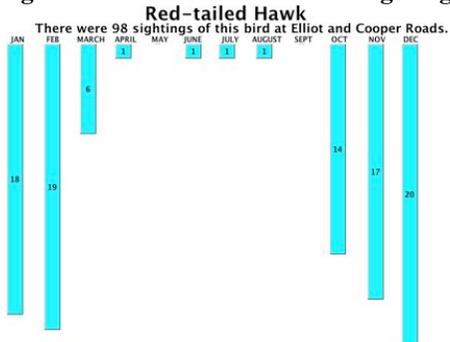
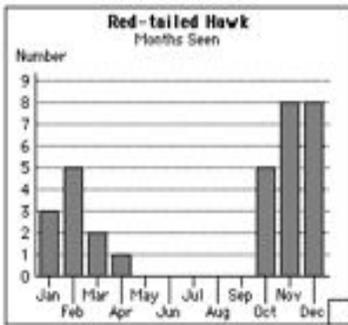
Author's Notes:

I haven't chanced upon this hawk very often. They are much more common in other parts of the country. Here is every record I have for the bird

- Swainson's Hawk, 5/31/1971, Oklahoma on 1971 Trip*
- Swainson's Hawk, 8/8/1971, Cotton Fields Safford Arizona*
- Swainson's Hawk, 03/07/1975, Montezuma Well*
- Swainson's Hawk, 04/24/1999, Gilbert and Riggs Roads*
- Swainson's Hawk, 11/6/1999, Elliot and Cooper Roads*
- Swainson's Hawk, 07/04/2001, Lake Itasca*
- Swainson's Hawk, 11/22/2001, Wendy's Neighborhood in Dallas*
- Swainson's Hawk, 02/22/2003, Madera Canyon*
- Swainson's Hawk, 02/23/2003, Tucson Arizona*
- Swainson's Hawk, 08/07/2007, Patagonia*
- Swainson's Hawk, 08/08/2007, San Pedro River*

RED-TAILED HAWK

1995-2003 Database: 32 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 98 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		11	7	11	2	0	3	7	5		8	2	7	20	14

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: April through September the bird has not been sighted much at all. Best bet for sighting is

November through February. Dark phase first observed December 1, 1996 and very often afterwards.

Other Sites to Try Most anywhere but try any field down Gilbert Road southbound off Elliot.

Identification: The most common buteo (soaring hawk) in the area. The light to dark red tail is easy to see whether the bird is perched or flying. Look for a ragged band across this large hawk's belly. A dark phase is also common at the site. It has a two-toned, brown and white pattern without the belly band when viewed from below but with the same red tail.

Author's Notes:

This hawk is commonly seen perched upon telephone poles in any rural area but it seems also to be part and parcel of the Arizona desert. Some database notes:

***Red-tailed Hawk**, 7/21/1971, Cotton Fields Salome Arizona, Hawk's prey in tree all bloody.*

***Red-tailed Hawk**, 12/5/1999, North Villas Lane, Soaring with Harris's Hawk.*

***Red-tailed Hawk**, 08/3/2002, Flagstaff House, Christopher and I thought this was a Swainson's at first but I am convinced it's an immature RTH. There were more than one that would come over the house and this one screeched a lot like a RTH and had the dark belly band.*

***Red-tailed Hawk**, 11/11/2002, Generic Place Anywhere, Up by that mysterious pond in a tree by the dump. Band across his belly. Whitish tail. Looked at me and flew away. Saw a few others really up close. One was in a tree out the car window. Stared at me and flew.*

FERRUGINOUS HAWK

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			2	1												

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try: Seen at McQueen and Elliot Roads, but the area there is being developed.

Identification: A large soaring hawk with a light, nearly white tail. Legs form a V against the light belly. The darker morph has a two-toned appearance from below and with its white tail it looks for a moment like an adult bald eagle. Wings are tipped with dark, finger-like feathers which are visible in flight.

Author's Notes:

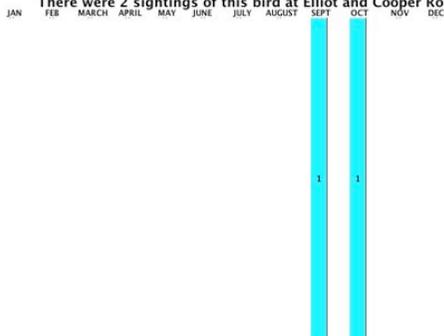
The very white tail in one sighting made the bird look like a bald eagle. It often pays to stay at the site for an hour or so in order to see new fly-ins. On February 15, 1998, I waited for a while and a ferruginous hawk soared in out of nowhere. My database notes on that sighting look like this:

Ferruginous Hawk, 2/15/1998, Elliot and Cooper Roads, Larry showed up there by chance. Larry later asked if I saw the white tail and I said "Heck yes. Don't you remember how I said "Is this some sort of weird bald eagle?" It was the rare darker phase. We saw 33 species.

GOLDEN EAGLE

1995-2011 Database: 2 Sightings
Golden Eagle

There were 2 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
								1							1	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare.

Other Sites to Try:

The site with the most golden eagles was McQueen and Elliot Roads, which is mostly developed now. I have only sporadic records elsewhere.

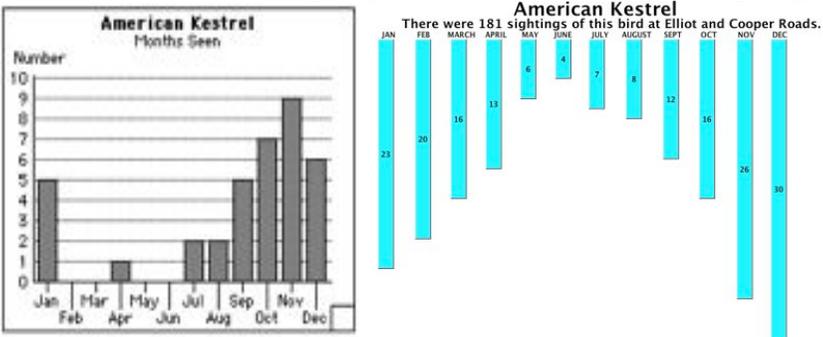
Identification: Immatures have a whitish tail band and some white under the wings. Adults lack the obvious white head and tail of the adult bald eagle. Look for a big bird with a very large wing surface soaring like a red-tailed hawk.

Author's Notes:

Perhaps what attracted the golden eagle to McQueen and Elliot Roads was the huge population of jackrabbits there. I used to drive my truck down the dirt road in the middle of the field, and these hares would race away from me in such numbers that I thought I might run them over. The eagle had two ways of killing the jackrabbits. The first was simple. He would fall from the sky, looking something like a kite whose string had been cut, and land directly on top of a rabbit which had crouched frozen in the middle of the plowed field. The rabbit's freezing strategy was worthless. I also witnessed the eagle pursuing a terrified rabbit that raced across the field. When another rabbit stopped to rubberneck, the eagle turned and grabbed *him!*

AMERICAN KESTREL

1995-2003 Database: 37 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 181 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		13	11	6		5	6	15	12	7	11	6	18	40	30

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Very clear curve that starts with its peak in December and slowly and consistently declines to a low in June after which the numbers of sightings begin to rise evenly to peak in December once again.

Other Sites to Try: Almost anywhere.

Identification: This most common of falcons can be seen on telephone poles or hovering over fields. The male is multi-colored and the female more brownish. As with all falcons, look for the pointed wings. This falcon is easy to identify because of its small size.

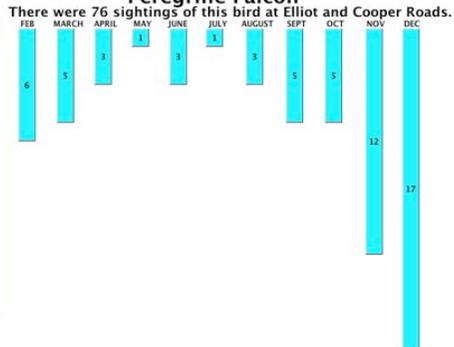
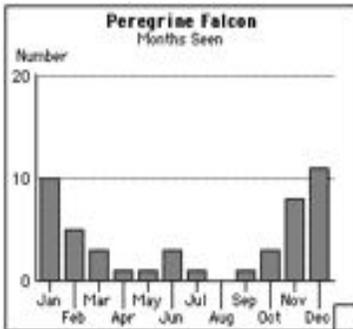
Author's Notes:

Some bird watchers can't help but correct you when you refer to these birds by their more common name, "sparrow hawk." Perhaps they feel the birds don't eat as many sparrows as they do grasshoppers and other insects. I personally like the more common name, and I can attest to the fact that these little falcons do eat birds—and ones even bigger than the average sparrow:

American Kestrel, 12/23/1998, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, This kestrel came roaring into the clearing grabbed an Inca dove and flew off with it. The other Inca doves buzzed away in HORROR. What a sight!

PEREGRINE FALCON

1995-2003 Database: 47 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 76 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		1	7	8	16	8	3	5	12	3	1	4		2	3	3

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Common at the site. Often seen on the northeast corner of the site from the canal road near Pond 6 perched on the power towers. This is by far the best site in the database for seeing the peregrine falcon. The graph is very similar to that of the kestrel with generally fewer sightings after December falling to a low in the summer and then rising again.

Other Sites to Try: Records exist in the database for the Water Ranch, Gilbert and Riggs Roads, Baseline and Power Roads, Pima Canyon, Arizona State University, and McQueen and Elliot Roads (now under development).

Identification: Large falcon with pointed wings and a bold facial pattern.

Author's Notes:

This is one of the birds that made a come-back after DDT use was halted. When I was nineteen, I wrote a letter to John W. Campbell, the editor of Analog Magazine. I was taking him to task on one of his editorials. I wrote in part: "I don't know to which birds you refer, but the Brown Pelican, the Duck Hawk (Peregrine Falcon) and I would like to know which birds have produced DDT-resistant strains." Campbell wrote me back a long, angry letter, and almost 20 years later I sent Isaac Asimov a copy of the correspondence because he had been very close to Campbell. I felt very proud when Asimov sided with me and actually wrote back with this humorous post card:

13 June 1989

Dear Mr. Cole,

I don't blame you for being irritated with Campbell; he irritated me constantly. I think he saw himself as fulfilling Socrates' function as gadfly and could never figure out how serious he was in some of his ridiculous notions. I do know that there were times when I feverishly wished I had a cup of hemlock handy -- for him, of course.

Isaac Cameron

PRAIRIE FALCON

1995-2003 Database: 2 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
					1	1										

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not common at the site. Year 2000 sighting was May 29 and the year 2001 sighting May 28.

Other Sites to Try: Seen several times at McQueen and Elliot Roads but the area there is being developed. One record for the

Superstition Mountains in 1998, one for Montezuma Well in 1975, and one for Higley and Ocotillo Roads in 2010.

Identification: Paler than the adult peregrine with less distinct facial markings. Black underneath where the wings meet the body helps confirm identification.

Author's Notes:

Here are some notes from the database:

Prairie Falcon, 03/07/1975, Montezuma Well

Prairie Falcon, 12/28/1998, Superstitions, This bird was light in color and sat on top of a saguaro skeleton most of the time when it wasn't flying.

Prairie Falcon, 5/29/2000, Elliot and Cooper Roads, He was in that tree that you often see G B Herons and M. Doves in. That dead tree.

Prairie Falcon, 05/01/2004, McQueen and Elliot Roads, He was eating a gopher or bird or something. Very light — almost white. Streaked. Black under the wings for id. Facial pattern faded-looking.

Prairie Falcon, 01/07/2010, Higley and Ocotillo Roads, He was flying around and messing with the harrier. Dullish brown and milky back.

RING-NECKED PHEASANT

1995-2003 Database: 2 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			2													

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site. Rumor has it that someone threw a pair over the fence. Both male and female seen.

Other Sites to Try:

South Dakota

Identification: It's impossible to misidentify this royally plumed giant.

Author's Notes:

This bird was once on the bird list for Maricopa County but was removed many years ago. Some, then, may say that I'm cheating by adding this bird to the Elliot and Cooper list, but I saw it, and who can prove that it wasn't a wayward vagrant from the Dakotas?

Here are all of the records for the bird in the database. The first shows the use of a generic place name, the feature in the database that allows me to record birds even though I don't have an exact

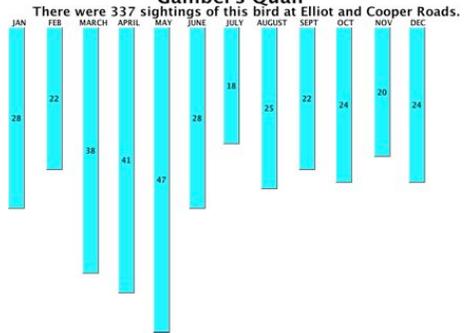
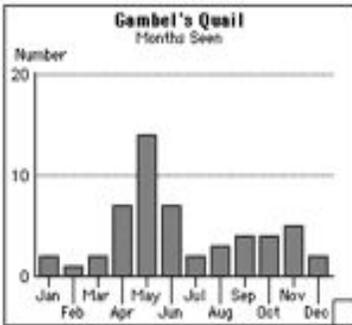
place. The name “South Dakota” in the first record below exists simply as a note that was attached to the bird. The actual place name is still “Generic Highway.”

- Ring-necked Pheasant, 06/10/1987, Generic Highway, South Dakota*
- Ring-necked Pheasant, 10/25/1998, Elliot and Cooper Roads*
- Ring-necked Pheasant, 11/1/1998, Elliot and Cooper Roads*

GAMBEL'S QUAIL

1995-2003 Database: 53 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 337 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			15	20	5	6	6	2	15	13	7	12	10	34	109	83

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Seen all year.

Other Sites to Try: Pima Canyon in South Mountain Park is often the best place.

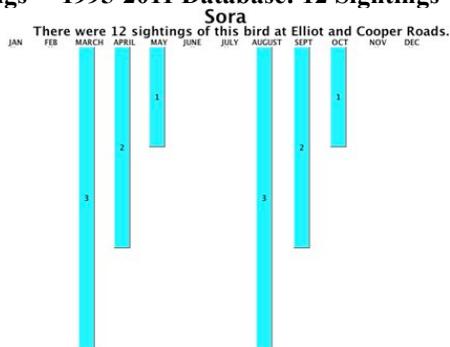
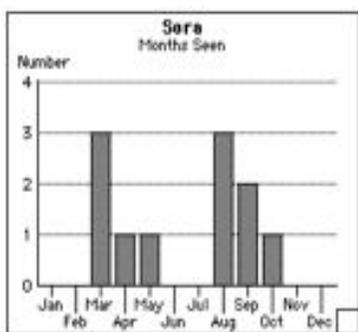
Identification: Look for the classic question-mark plume on the head. Seen in groups on the ground and may explode into labored flight if startled. Male has a large black spot on the stomach, a black face bordered by white, and a rufous crown. Its cat-like meow is easily recognized and the bird has often been added to the list as a “heard only.”

Author's Notes:

The Gambel's quail always startles you when it explodes into flight just ahead of you. I imagine that the noise sets a coyote or other predator back on its heels for just long enough to make the explosive flight a selective advantage for the bird. This is actually quite a spectacularly decorated bird if for nothing more than the bold facial markings.

SORA

1995-2003 Database: 11 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 12 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				10		1			1							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Not very common at the site. Seen in Pond 10 behind the fire station.

Other Sites to Try: Ayer Lake at Boyce Thompson Arboretum, where it was observed twice, and at the Water Ranch.

Identification: The yellow beak, black mask, and slender, chicken-like shape makes this rail easy to identify. Look for it in the reeds near shore.

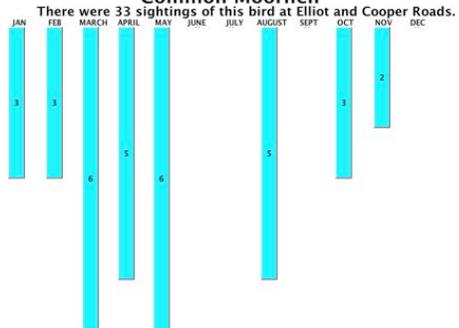
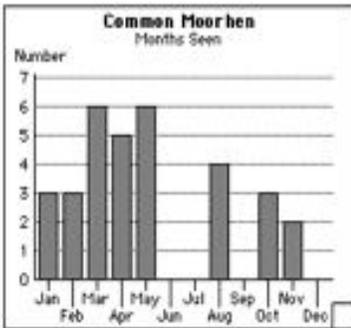
Author's Notes:

I was surprised when on 11/27/1998 I saw a sora that seemed to be very tame indeed. It would let you walk right up to it as it walked around the shore of Ayer Lake at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

COMMON MOORHEN

1995-2003 Database: 32 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 33 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		1		16	5		10		1							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: In some years quite common at the site.

Other Sites to Try: The Phoenix Zoo, El Mirage Pond, the Water Ranch.

Identification: Hard to misidentify this coot-like bird with the screaming red beak and little white racing stripes under its wings.

Author's Notes:

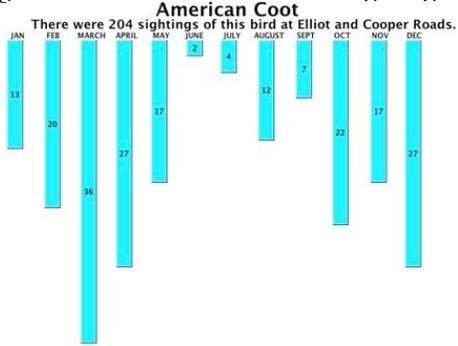
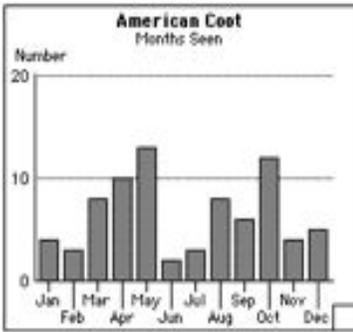
The purple gallinule has never been seen at the site, but it is even more spectacular than its cousin the common moorhen, formerly called the common gallinule. On a trip to Yucatan, I sat at a restaurant table and looked out across the alligator-invested Lake Coba. I wrote in my journal:

There was a Mayan guy there who got into a big discussion with us about calendars and counting in the Mayan language. He said he had a bird book at home. He reminded me a lot of me: "I've got a BOOK on that at home!" He carried a little notebook like mine with him, and in it we wrote down the English names for birds he wanted to know about. We went and bought him a Montejo and even though he was the waiter, he sat down and drank it with us. From our table, I spotted a spectacularly colored purple gallinule walking on the shore and the Mayan guy knew the Spanish name, *gallineta*. Mayan mathematics is a bit dull, and we got tired of making the effort. We bid him *adiós* and walked down the shore and saw a ruddy crane, which we both agreed was quite a good bird to see.

AMERICAN COOT

1995-2003 Database: 78 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 204 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		14	25	12	15	10	10	53	25	2	13	3	1	17	3

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Seen all year but is often absent. Chicks have been observed at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

Most anywhere with water.

Identification: Non-bird watchers tend to mistake the bird for a duck, but the white chicken-like beak and black body make the coot hard to misidentify. Feet are green, webbed and look something like the hands of the Creature from the Black Lagoon. The lowly "mud hen" builds floating nests.

Author's Notes:

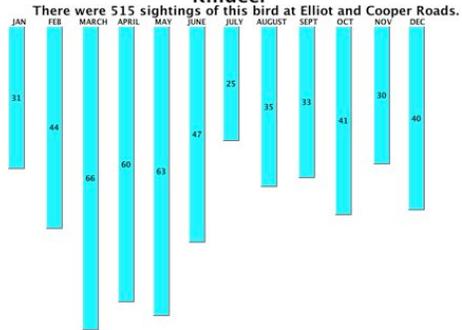
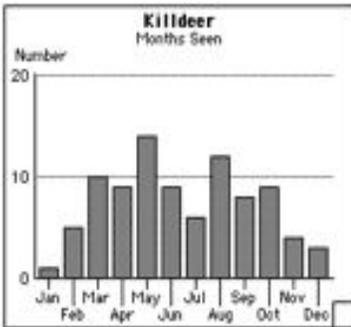
I've always had a fascination for this gruesome-footed muck denizen. In college, we decided to brew some beer. We used bread yeast and a jury-rigged fermentation tank. This was in the days

before the high-tech plastic Coke bottles that can hold any charge and are ideal for brewing, so we had to buy a capper and use glass bottles. We christened our beer “Coot Suds.” I carved the image of a coot on an eraser, and we used that with an ink pad to stamp out the labels which read "Mud Hen Brewery.” We had a lot of fun brewing it, but God, it was awful beer!

KILLDEER

1995-2003 Database: 89 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 515 Sightings
Killdeer



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		19	26	15	14	12	13	69	53	19	37	21	40	98	78

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Seen year round.

Other Sites to Try: Anywhere except maybe desert canyons without water.

Identification: A two-toned black and white plover with red eyes. Its distinctive call is one of the most familiar sounds of sewer flats and ponds although it doesn't always sound like the bird's name. Adult has twin bands across the throat. Sharp wings give it a falcon-like look in flight. Its call may be heard as the bird is flying at night.

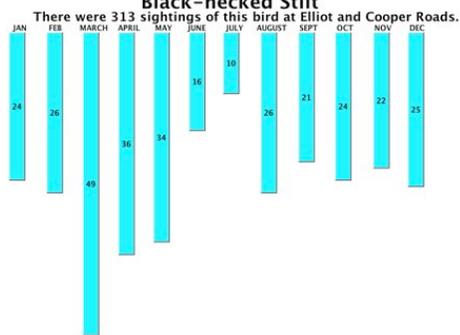
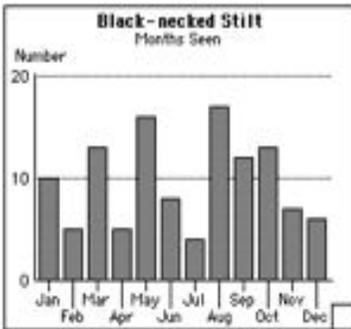
Author's Notes:

The killdeer's call is often the first thing heard when you step out of your car to bird watch at Elliot and Cooper Roads or any other place with water and shore birds, and it always seems to set the stage for good times and good memories. Once, in the 1960s, I was in the Minnesota woods near Lake Itasca. Near a muddy clearing in the trees, I heard the distinct words, "*killdeer! killdeer!*" Never again have I heard the bird say its name so distinctly. In 1987, 2000, 2001, and 2009 I returned to Minnesota and each time looked in the woods for the same muddy clearing but could not find it. Perhaps it has been grown over completely with the passing of the decades.

BLACK-NECKED STILT

1995-2003 Database: 115 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 313 Sightings
Black-necked Stilt



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		27	34	16	21	14	13	67	32	6	19	6	16	22	19

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Seen all year round. The bird was not recorded at every sighting in the earlier database because it seemed almost always to be present. Thus, the graph should probably appear much flatter and with a much larger total of sightings. Less water in the ponds in later years has made the

bird less often sighted. The stilt is more commonly seen than the avocet in any of the sites in the database.

Other Sites to Try: The Water Ranch, Baseline and Power Roads, Gilbert and Riggs Roads, Higley and Ocotillo Roads.

Identification: The plain black and white color and the impossibly long pink legs make misidentification of the black-necked stilt unlikely. The only similar bird is the American avocet.

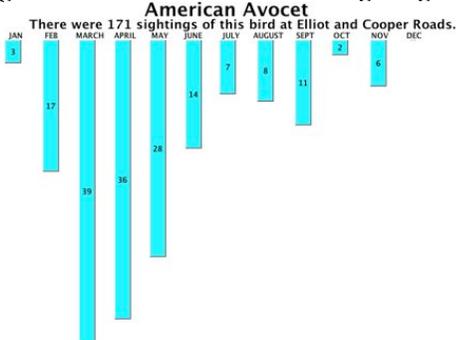
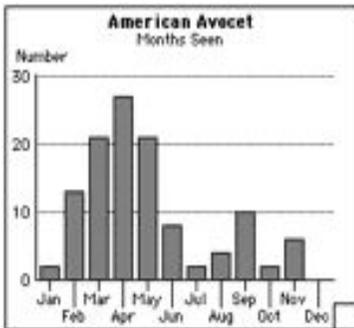
Author's Notes:

This very common local bird used always to seem nonetheless exotic to me and I sought it out. One memory is of a blazing hot August day with the scolding stilts flying above me. Now a part of the database, my 1971 journal notes say:

Mesa Sewer Flats 8/27/1971 Birthday. Black neck stilts. Steve got hot and said he almost died walking over to see the stilts. Mesa Sewer flats. I'm 20 years old.

AMERICAN AVOCET

1995-2003 Database: 116 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 171 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		4	36	30	20	13	11	2	42	10	1	1	1			

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Has been seen in most months of the year but February to May are the peak months. Much less common than the black-necked stilt and therefore more faithfully recorded in the database. The avocet has been recorded here most often from March to May and never in December. Has been observed harassing turkey vultures at fairly high altitude.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch and Higley and Ocotillo Roads.

Identification: Like the black-necked stilt but with a white stripe on the black wing. This stripe and its black and white back form a two-toned pattern when the bird flies much different from the solid black back of the black-necked stilt in flight. The beak has a pronounced upward turn. There is no black on the neck at all . In breeding plumage the neck is tan and in the winter grayish.

Author's Notes:

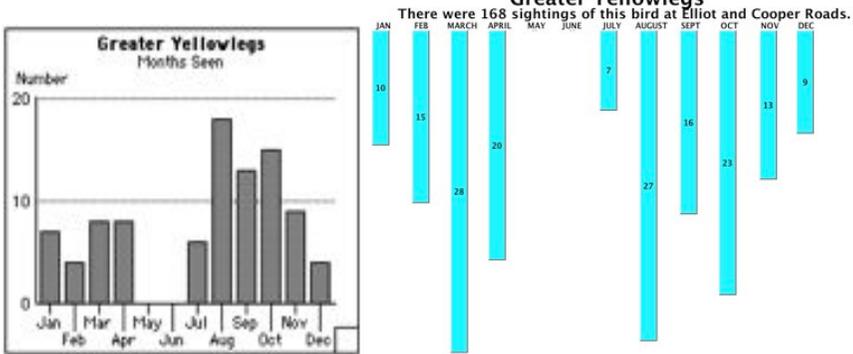
The April 23, 2000 journal entry in the database for Elliot and Cooper Roads reads:

Elliot and Cooper Roads 4/23/2000 An American avocet is high in the sky flying circles around a turkey vulture, harassing him. It always surprises me to see these waders get into the air and fly like jet fighters.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS

1995-2003 Database: 92 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 168 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1	1	32	20	15	5	14	12	24	6		3	3	10	13	9

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Often at Elliot and Cooper Roads, I have heard its call and then scanned the flats to find it. Fairly common at the site but missing in May and June.

Other Sites to Try:

Except for Elliot and Cooper Roads, the Water Ranch and Higley and Ocotillo Roads have by far the most records for this bird.

Identification: The greater yellowlegs' three to five-note call is heard once and never forgotten. Beak is fairly large and slightly upturned. Legs long and yellow. This is a light-colored, evenly mottled bird that is seen wading away from cover on flats.

Author's Notes:

If you are a shorebird fan, as I am, the greater yellowlegs is always a great bird to see. As mentioned in the introduction to this

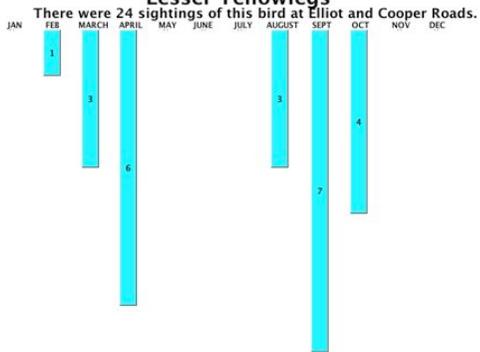
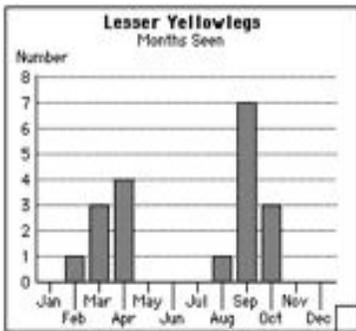
book, my first trip to Elliot and Cooper Roads was a journey to see a shorebird. I think I enjoy them because of the vicarious pleasure I get from watching them rooting around in the shallows for food. I feel I can identify with them because I would like to be wading out there myself. People watch birds for all kinds of reasons and perhaps this one is not uncommon.

The greater yellowlegs has the shorebird habit of rocking back and forth or teeter tottering just occasionally. It's also fairly large. Once, in a city canal, I came across one but couldn't at first identify it. It was mottled and speckled and seemed absolutely huge. Later I realized that I had never been so close to one and was not used to the detail I was seeing.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS

1995-2003 Database: 19 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 24 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				8	6	1	4	2	2							1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Graphs from the two databases are nearly identical.

Other Sites to Try: The Water Ranch

Identification: Very similar to the greater yellowlegs, but noticeably smaller with a smaller beak.

Author's Notes:

The database reveals a 27-year gap between my first and second sightings of this bird. This is mostly due to not keeping records for many years and not bird watching as much in the 1980s.

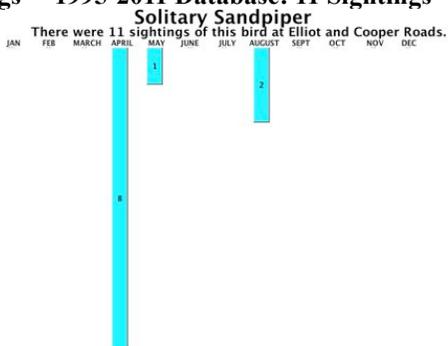
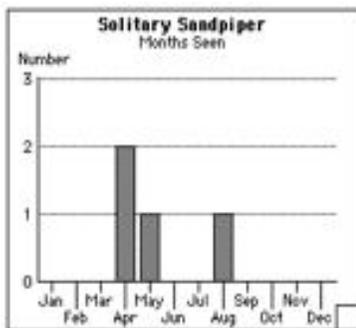
Lesser Yellowlegs, 3/5/1972, Mesa Sewer Flats

Lesser Yellowlegs, 2/20/1999, Elliot and Cooper Roads

SOLITARY SANDPIPER

1995-2003 Database: 4 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 11 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
					1	1	2		4							3

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not common at the site.

Other Sites to Try: The only other sighting in the database is for McQueen and Elliot Roads 8/17/2002 where the bird was filmed at a mud puddle.

Identification: The solitary sandpiper has a somewhat slender build but is bigger than the least sandpipers and even the spotted sandpiper. Look for a two-toned appearance, dark above and white below and the slender beak. The white eye ring is a good field mark. There is black barring on the tail when the bird is on the ground and it is visible at distance and even in flight against the white background. As the name implies, it will usually be seen alone.

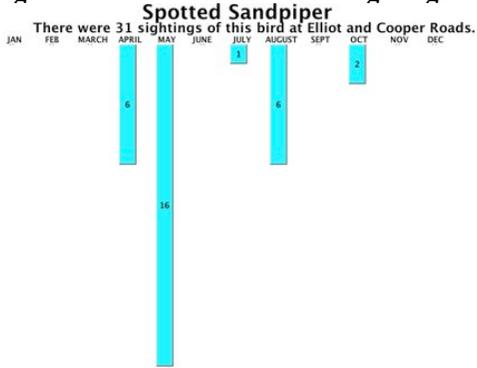
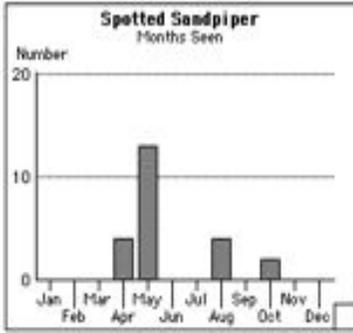
Author's Notes:

Not far from Elliot and Cooper Roads is another site, McQueen and Elliot Roads. As mentioned in the introduction, the place is getting developed with an industrial park and will soon cease to be a place to watch birds. On Saturday, August 17, 2002, I had one of my earliest sightings of the solitary sandpiper in a wide, muddy puddle in the field.

Solitary Sandpiper, 08/17/2002, McQueen and Elliot Roads, I filmed this bird with my new digital movie camera. I was very surprised to see this bird. He flew up and away and made his call and came back. Noodles and I saw him. He was in that swampy pool by the canal at the west-most area. I got good movies of him.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER

1995-2003 Database: 23 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 31 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			6	6	1	4	5	1	6						1	1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not especially common at the site. Seen in both winter and breeding plumage.

Other Sites to Try: Records exist in the database for Baseline and Power Roads and the Water Ranch. One sighting at Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Identification: Continuously teeter totters back and forth. Both the yellow bill and black spots are missing in winter plumage. Solitary; rarely seen with companions.

Author's Notes:

On a February 7, 1998 on an outing to Baseline and Power Roads I wrote the following into my paper journal:

I remember seeing some movement on a shore and saying, “Hey, what’s that?” I watched my friend scan the shoreline with his Elite roof prism

binoculars, locate the bird in question, and say almost with disdain, “Spotted sandpiper.” He panned away with the binoculars almost immediately, but I focused in with my Swift Audubon Porros.

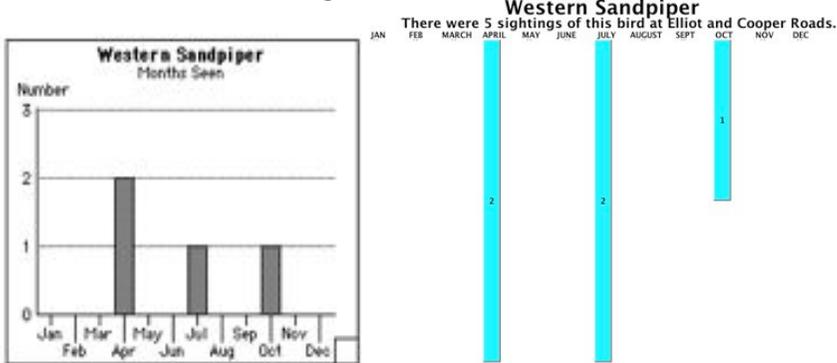
I had made the diagnosis at the same time he had; the bird teeter-tottered and just by that behavior alone I knew that it might be a “spotty” as Roger Tory Peterson calls it in one of his famous field guides. The difference between my friend and me was that I hadn’t seen one in quite a while and wanted to get a good look.

The sandpiper had its winter plumage—no spots at all and no hint of yellow on the beak. I looked at him for a long time and watched how he favored the rocks when he walked, teeter-tottering almost continuously—classic spotted sandpiper behavior. There was also only one of him—another clue to identification as spotted sandpipers are usually seen singly. We saw about forty-five species that day and many of the sightings stand out in my mind as clearly as that of the sandpiper.

WESTERN SANDPIPER

1995-2003 Database: 4 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 5 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1		1	2			1							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Few records in the database for this bird. Compare with least sandpiper below.

Other Sites to Try:

Records for this bird exist in the database for the Water Ranch and Gilbert and Riggs Roads.

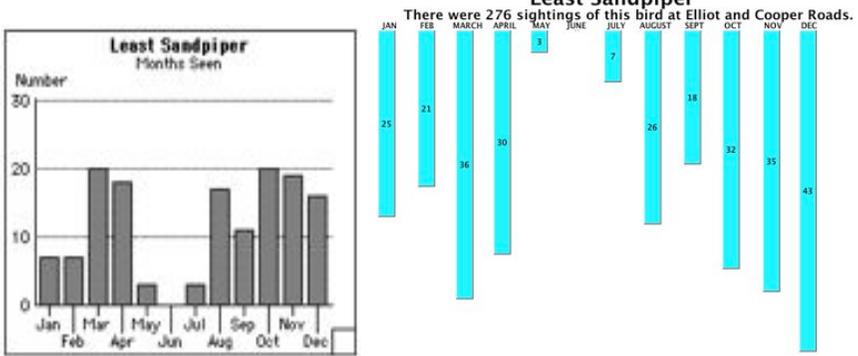
Identification: Should be a bit larger in size and lack the yellow legs of the least sandpiper, but the least's legs could be covered with mud. Beak is larger than the least's and has a slight droop at the tip.

Author's Notes:

I generally record the least sandpiper when there is any question of identification at Elliot and Cooper Roads. I'm just not very good at feeling confident that the bird I'm looking at is really a western. The sightings recorded above were made with more experienced bird watchers helping. Perhaps, however, the scarcity of sightings is not a reflection of faulty skills on my part but the fact there are so few westerns that visit the site. I suspect that there are many misidentifications by people who mistake well fed least sandpipers for westerns.

LEAST SANDPIPER

1995-2003 Database: 141 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 276 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		39	35	28	20	14	17	55	18	2	13	1	5	13	15

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Absent in June. Its graph at the site looks a great deal like the long-billed dowitcher's.

Other Sites to Try: Many records exist for this bird at the Water Ranch and Higley and Ocotillo Roads. There are five records at Tempe Town Lake, one record for Baseline and Power Roads, and two for El Mirage Pond.

Identification: A tiny sandpiper that appears in fairly large flocks at the site. Legs are yellow. Look for the least on muddy or sandy flats in the open.

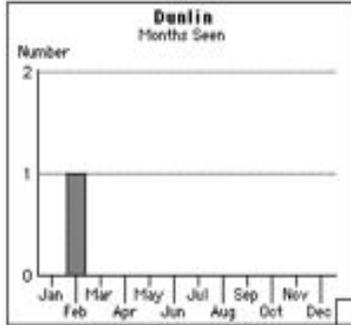
Author's Notes:

The least sandpiper is one of the tiny shorebirds that are lumped together in the informal group referred to as "peeps." Like so many other of the shorebirds, least sandpipers will fly in tight flocks and land together on muddy flats. Such birds are out all day feeding, and this makes sites like Elliot and Cooper Roads

especially good places for birding; it is best to look for woodland species early in the morning before the heat of the day when the birds seek cover, but the peeps and other shorebirds are just as easy to find at three o'clock in the afternoon as at eight in the morning.

DUNLIN

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		1														

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

No other nearby records for this bird exist in the database.

Identification: This sandpiper has a long bill drooping at the end, a reddish back and in breeding plumage a black spot on its belly.

Author's Notes:

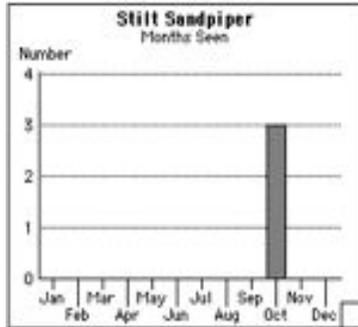
Along the canal road to the north of the site are informative signs with paintings of birds. One of the birds is the dunlin. I've never been sure that this was a good choice for the sign because of

how rare the bird is at the site. I have only three sightings of the bird for all places in the database.

Dunlin, 2/23/1997, Elliot and Cooper Roads
Dunlin, 12/16/2010, Greenfield and Guadalupe Roads, HAVEN'T SEEN ONE IN ABOUT 14 YEARS. There were two. I thought they were too big for least sandies. They were twice as big. I noted this when two leasts came up to offer the opportunity for some comparative study. They just sat there and didn't worry when I got rather close. Winter plumage.
Dunlin, 12/25/2010, Greenfield and Guadalupe Roads, Those two were still there.

STILT SANDPIPER

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				2	1											

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site. Seen both years in October.

Other Sites to Try: No other records exist for the bird in the database.

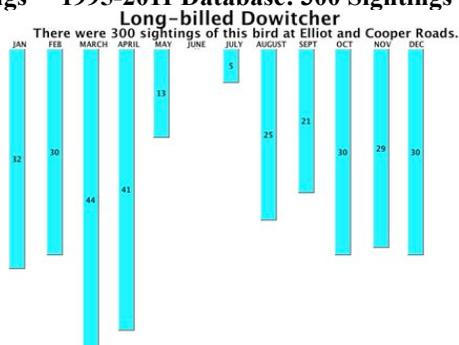
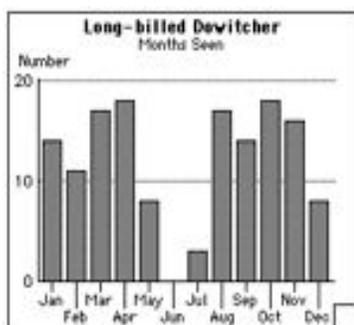
Identification: Medium-sized wader rather like a dowitcher with a much shorter beak or a greater yellowlegs with shorter, greener legs. Its bill has a broken downward turn starting near the end as if someone had reached out and bent it. Feeds with dowitchers.

Author's Notes:

Arizona is well west of this bird's typical migration path, and so I feel lucky whenever he has strayed this far.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER

1995-2003 Database: 144 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 300 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
1	2	1	35	33	31	17	19	20	59	20	1	14	5	3	19	20

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: June and July are clearly not the best months to see this bird. At other times of year, they are abundant. Seen in every area of the site and in every year. Observed in winter plumage and in breeding plumage. One found dead on the canal road 2/16/2002.

Other Sites to Try:

Most often seen at the Water Ranch and Higley and Ocotillo Roads.

Identification: Common in fairly large flocks feeding in open areas of shallow water. Bill very long, fairly thick, and straight, legs yellowish to gray. Dowitchers are browner in breeding plumage and grayer in winter plumage. Light eye line. Watch for white rump in flight and light banding on the white tail. Probes in the water with a sewing machine motion of the beak. If the bird is alone and near cover, look to see if it is the more heavily streaked common snipe.

Author's Notes:

As mentioned in the first sentence of the introduction to this book, this is the bird that started it all. For some reason, this is my favorite bird. Something magical happens in my mind and in my imagination when I see long-billed dowitchers because I know that they have flown all of the way down from Alaska or even Siberia and yet in the summer seem at home here wading in the boiling waters under a blazing Arizona sun.

It is hard to imagine it, but there was a time when such birds were hunted and killed in great numbers as a food item. Apparently, many sandpipers are delicious. In fact, the Eskimo curlew was so sought after as a restaurant main course that it is now likely extinct, shot out of existence by hunters.

Everyone has heard the humorous limerick "The Pelican," and in honor of the long-billed dowitcher, I sweated out one for him. Here's how it goes:

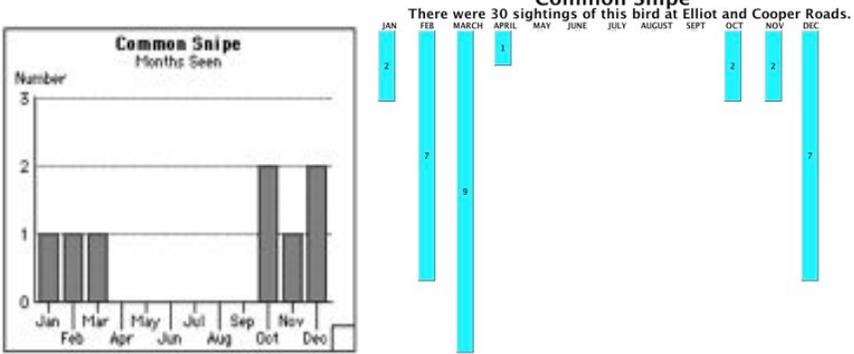
The Dowitcher

My favorite bird is the dowitcher
It has a beak as big as a howitzer
And when it moves it, it seems like a sewing machine
But it's just getting pieces of chow which're
Quite tasty, thank you very much indeed!

COMMON SNIPE

1995-2003 Database: 8 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 30 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			2	5	1			1	8		1	2	2		2	6

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not uncommon at the site. Not recorded at all May through September.

Other Sites to Try: Seen often at the Water Ranch. There are two records for November and December 1971 at the Verde River. On September 23, 2000, I caught a sick snipe behind Macayo's Restaurant on Dobson and Baseline Roads. (See the Ring-necked Duck for more on this location.)

Identification: Looks very much like a long-billed dowitcher but has heavy dark chocolate colored streaking on the back and face. Note rusty tail feathers. Look for the snipe on the brushy areas next to the shore (or even on the shore) where dowitchers don't usually feed. Usually seen alone. Note brown (not white) rump during zig-zag flight and a band of reddish tail feathers.

Author's Notes:

One of my encounters with snipes resulted in a small contribution to literature—if you care to call it that. Here's what happened: I was diddling on the computer, writing a letter to a friend. I was using Microsoft Outlook, and I was vexed by its broken interface. Each paragraph return was dragging the left margin around and refusing to wrap, so I got miffed and just started hitting the return key with each sentence or phrase—making breaks whenever I darned well felt like it. Then I sent the message in a snit. My friend read it and e-mailed me back. Could she send her friend my wonderful "poem?" I replied, "Sure."

Here's the so-called poem:

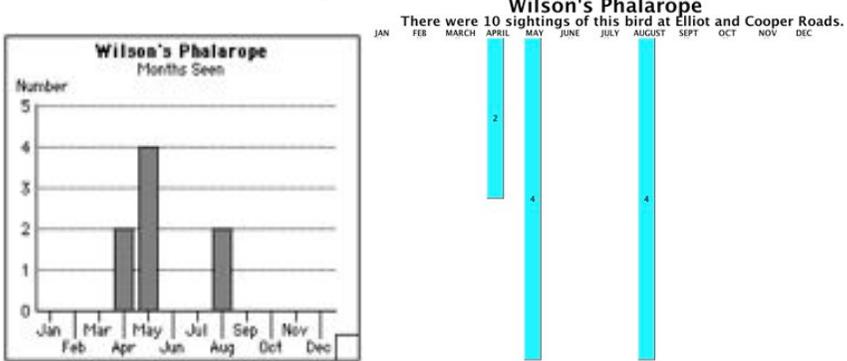
Nancy,

You will be happy to know that driving home yesterday
I espied a Long-billed Dowitcher on the side of the road
Close to rush hour traffic.
I applied the brakes,
Immediately reassessing and realizing
That it was a snipe!
I swung around
And picked up Mr. Inland Sandpiper.
He was very pretty—
Very very pretty was he indeed!
With a chocolate back,
A rosewood beak, (a teak beak)
And a tail like a Texas Prairie Chicken's.
Oh, he was a fine, fine—and beauteous creature,
Quiet and reserved,
And headed for the last round-up too I should think.
I left him in some weeds
And drove away.

I never told her it wasn't really a poem.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE

1995-2003 Database: 8 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 10 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			2	3		3			2							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Uncommon at the site. My Zim and Singer book dubs this bird “the landlubber of the family” as it isn’t pelagic.

Other Sites to Try: There are eleven sightings at the Water Ranch, where they have appeared in rather large flocks. Another good place is Higley and Ocotillo Roads, where the pelagic red-necked phalarope has also been seen.

Identification: Peterson writes: “If it swims, it’s a phalarope” to which I would add “if it spins” as these phalaropes spin in circles in shallow water to stir up food from the bottom. They have a sharp, thin, straight beak and are light in color except for the female which may have a black streak through the eye that turns rusty as it moves down the neck to the back.

Author's Notes:

When I first finished entering my old bird data into the database, I noted that I had seen the Wilson's phalarope only twice in the last twenty-seven years: on the same day as the first recorded spotted sandpiper: *Wilson's Phalarope*, 8/15/1971, *Mesa Sewer Flats* and then again on the 16th. I must have gone out to the sewer flats two days in a row. I sure let the bird watching slip.

The Wilson's phalarope is an unusual bird now classified as a sandpiper. It spins in shallow water and causes a vortex that lifts insect larvae and other food from the bottom to within reach of its needle-like bill. The scene from those two sightings has been a constant part of my memory and mindset: a wandering shorebird and its companions spinning like toy ducks in the still, brackish water of the Mesa Sewer Flats—an almost magical vision of birds that had traveled thousands of miles and were just passing by Arizona on their way to somewhere else.

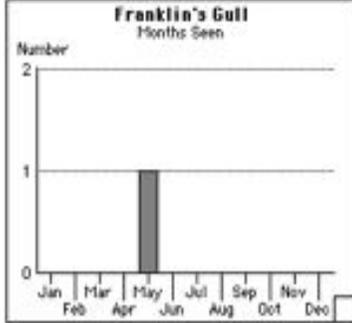
I would be on the lookout for that bird, and I was finally rewarded at Elliot and Cooper Roads on May 2, 1998. Eight Wilson's phalaropes were spinning in circles on pond 10. My seven-year-old nephew, Sonny saw them and when I showed him the picture in the book, he pointed to the phalarope with the red on its neck and said, "Well, this must be the male because the male is usually more colorful."

Dang! Couldn't miss. "Er, actually, Sonny, the female phalarope is the brighter of the two," I said. "Very unusual."

I called some friends on the phone and they came over the next day with me and the phalaropes were still there. The birds were gone the day after that.

FRANKLIN'S GULL

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				1												

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try: There are no other nearby sightings of this bird in the database.

Identification: This is a small gull with a black head, gray back, and white breast. Black patches near the white wing tips.

Author's Notes:

While this is a gull of the American prairies, it is the California gull that is claimed to have saved the Mormons' crops in 1848 and that is therefore the state bird of Utah.

RING-BILLED GULL

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				1												

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site

Other Sites to Try:

Records exist for this bird at the Water Ranch, Tempe Town Lake, Gilbert and Riggs Roads, Canyon Lake, and Apache Lake.

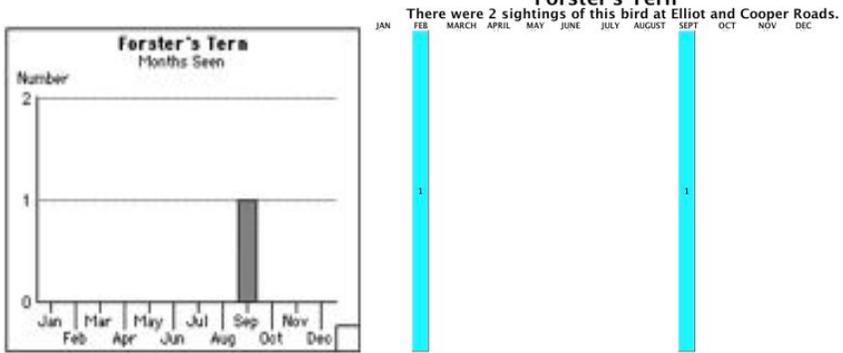
Identification: Gray above and white below, this is likely the gull you will see at watery reserves in the Valley. Look for the yellow beak with the dark ring at the tip.

Author's Notes:

Although the database has only one record for this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads, there are many records for it at the Water Ranch and elsewhere. Thus, I have found it somewhat of a disappointment to see a gull and then to find that it is this common species.

FORSTER'S TERN

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting 1995-2011 Database: 2 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1												1	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try: Seen also at the Water Ranch on four occasions.

Identification: You're not likely to see the common tern, which is very similar but has darker primary feathers than the Forster's, which are almost white. Look for an orange bill tipped in black and orange feet and legs. The black summer cap on the head disappears in the winter leaving a dark smudge around the eye that does not extend to the crown.

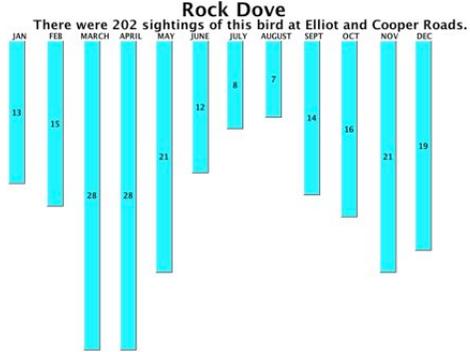
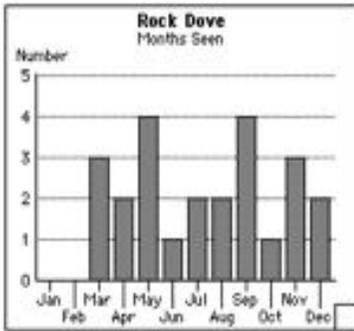
Author's Notes:

While I have plenty of sightings for this bird in Mexico, there are, as the figures above show, few locally. The 2010 record at the site has a note attached to it:

Forster's Tern, 2/27/2010, Elliot and Cooper Roads, There were a couple of them flying high up. There were some older people with me and I told them what I was seeing.

ROCK DOVE

1995-2003 Database: 24 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 202 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1	1	7	4	8	3		6	44	18	2	11	3	14	42	38

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Likely the bird should be seen on nearly every visit at least flying overhead. The complete lack of recorded sightings in the 78 visits in 2002 is surprising. The bird was most often recorded at times when it alighted on the shores to drink. Any that fly by are now written down and entered into the computer faithfully.

Other Sites to Try:

Anywhere people can be found.

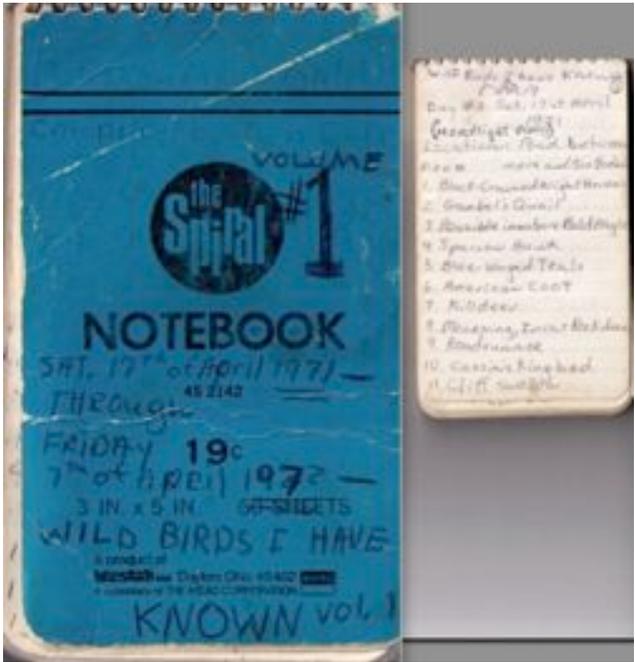
Identification: This is the large, common pigeon ubiquitous in parks and cities worldwide. On take-off, colliding wings make a slapping sound. Varies widely in color.

Author's Notes:

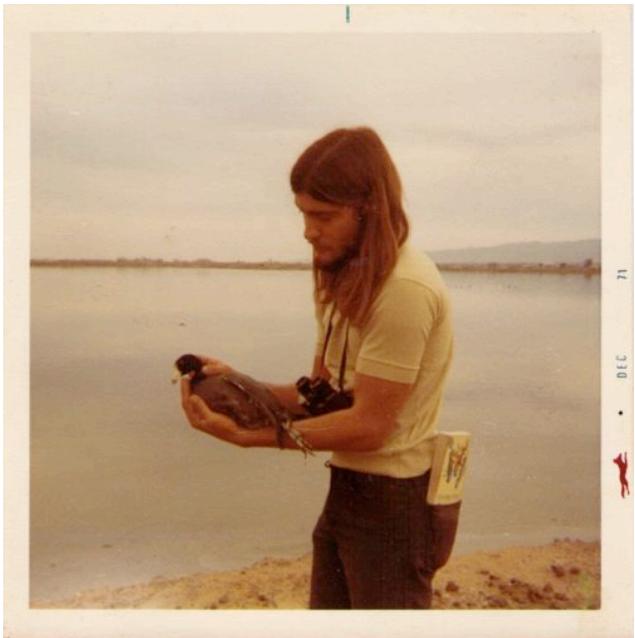
As a former pigeon breeder and fancier, there is really no bird closer to my heart than this one, the lowly sewer falcon, and I'm in pretty good company. In 1859, as part of Chapter One of the work that would forever change the world, the most famous of all rock dove fanciers wrote:

Believing that it is always best to study some special group, I have, after deliberation, taken up domestic pigeons. I have kept every breed which I could purchase or obtain and have been most kindly favoured with skins from several quarters of the world... Many treatises in different languages have been published on pigeons and some of them are very important, as being of considerable antiquity. I have associated with several eminent fanciers, and have been permitted to join two of the London Pigeon Clubs.

This, as you may have already guessed, is how Charles Darwin kicked off *The Origin of Species*. He describes how he took very different-looking breeds of pigeon and crossed them. The offspring were nondescript mutts. Then he crossed a pair of their offspring and observed that "...they produced a bird of as beautiful and blue colour, with the white loins, double black wing bar, and barred and white-edged tail-feathers, as any wild-rock pigeon!" They talk about Darwin's finches, but it is really the common rock dove that should first be credited for his insights.



The First Wild Birds I Have Known Notebook



The Author December 1971, Phoenix Sewer Flats



Wild Birds I Have Known Notebooks (Containing 26,843 Birds)



Wild Birds I Have Known Notebooks Front Cover View



The Suburban Street Corner Itself



Feeding Dowitchers, Least Sandpipers, and Black-Necked Stilts



November 11, 2003 Sign



Black-necked Stilt Mishap North Canal Road Fence



Typical Scene in Pond 9



Coyote puppy walks out of fenced area.



My Dog Noodles on the 500th Trip, July 30, 2004



This Cooper's Hawk was bothering an Inca dove.



Last of only four sightings of the cactus wren in seventeen years.



Black-hooded Parakeets



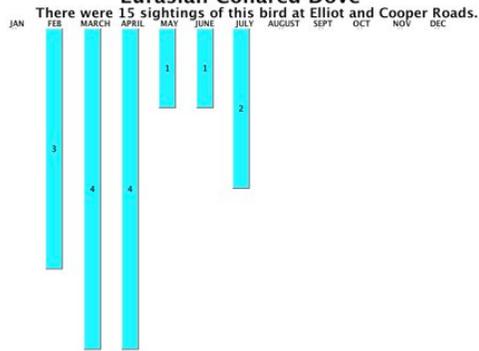
First Day of Retirement Merited a Three-piece Suit



1000th Trip, Bolo Tie, Birds, Near Beer, and Notebook

EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE

1995-2011 Database: 15 Sightings
Eurasian Collared Dove



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
											1			1	2	11

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Has only in recent years become common.

Other Sites to Try:

This bird is becoming more and more ubiquitous. It is everywhere in the Valley now and has become quite common in Flagstaff.

Identification: This large, pale bird has a black half ring on its neck. Its wing tips are darker than the rest of the body. It is quite skittish and will be the first bird to fly away from a feeder upon your approach. Its call is a loud, crow-like *caw!* that is given even in flight.

Author's Notes:

In September of 2004 I saw this bird in my back yard and misidentified it as a ringed turtle-dove. I never corrected the record:

Ringed Turtle-Dove,09/19/2004,North Villas Lane,Steve and I were here and I saw this pale washed-out bird fly out of my back yard. I got my binocs and it was a ringed turtle dove. He had been eating the grain I put out for the other birds. Oh this was the day I moved my computer into Steve's old room so I could have my kitchen back. This will be a day to remember because of the turtle dove and the computer move.

I found that the bird was beginning to spread across the US. On a trip to New Orleans, I attached a note to my record:

Eurasian Collared Dove,05/15/2006,New Orleans Louisiana,More common than any other dove here it seemed.

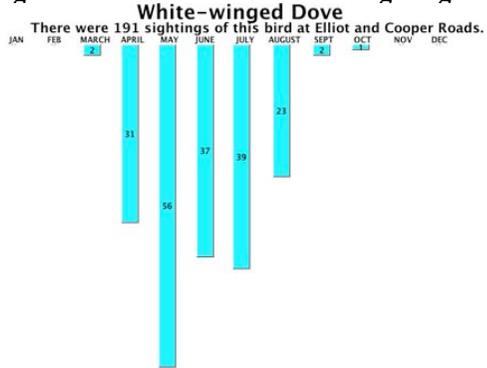
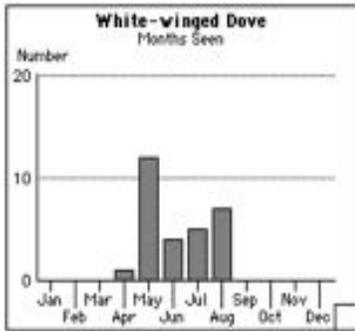
I used to welcome the Eurasian collared dove to my back yard, and I found that this bird liked to hang out in the pine trees in front of a neighbor's house about a quarter mile from mine. I used to go over there to look, but one day the neighbor's dog got loose and chased me up onto the hood of a car.

That must have been an inauspicious occurrence, for the bird has begun to lose favor with me. I have grown weary of its nasty call, and its appearance in my yard has become something of a banality. I liked the bird even less when I found it skulking about in the pines in Flagstaff, where I had previously seen the indigenous band-tailed pigeon, whose genus *Columba* is the same as my beloved domestic rock pigeon's. I felt that it was encroaching on the band-tail's environs, and I don't approve of any bird that has taken to such small practices.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE

1995-2003 Database: 29 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 191 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			9	11	4	4	1		12	18	7	11	6	15	58	35

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Always present April through August. The bird is mostly gone at the middle of September from most of the valley. In the 452 records in the database for all sites, the bird has matched the above charts (generally April to August) except for one unseasonable bird in December at Boyce Thompson Arboretum. I've been told that that bird likes the Arboretum and stays year round.

Other Sites to Try: Everywhere in season.

Identification: Large, long-billed dove with a rounded white-edged tail and large white wing patches. Listen for the bird's characteristic *koo koo ka jew!* call, also described as *Who cooks for you?* Close up, one can see powdery blue around the bright red eyes and a gold foil color on the breast. In flight, the bird's tail appears square.

Author's Notes:

This forty-year-old sighting seems like yesterday to me:

*White-winged Dove, 8/3/1971, Cotton Fields
Tucson, Tuesday I caught a white wing dove. They have
a long beak. And blue azure (redundant) eyelids.*

When these doves are in town, I often sing a verse of the Beatles song "I am the Walrus" and let the white-winged dove finish it in this way:

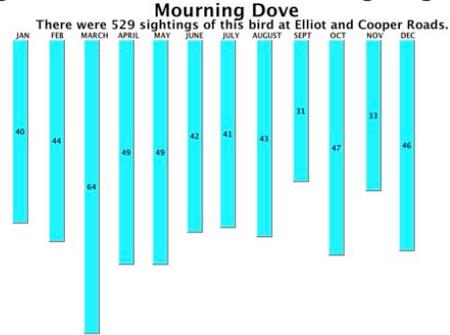
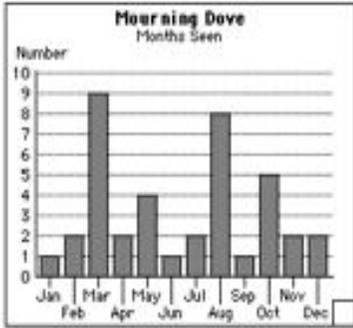
TC: I am the egg man
TC: They are the egg men
TC: I am the Walrus
WWD: *Koo koo ka jew!*

But that is not the only sound the dove makes; he has a slightly broader repertoire than the Inca and mourning doves, and you may first hear him before you see him in early April. While you'll occasionally hear some dove-like hoots when the Inca and mourning doves get in little tussles with others of their species, they basically sing the same songs, the Inca's *whirlpool!* *whirlpool!* and the mourning dove's mournful dirge. Thus, whenever you hear unusual dove-like cooing, you should check to see if the white-winged doves are back in town.

MOURNING DOVE

1995-2003 Database: 39 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 529 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		8	15	7	2	4	14	70	44	14	22	14	61	162	91

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

The old graph is accurate only in that the bird is present in all months. A truer reflection of the bird's presence here would be a more even number of sightings for each month as this extremely common bird was surely present at every visit to the site. Because the bird was always present, it was at first recorded only occasionally.

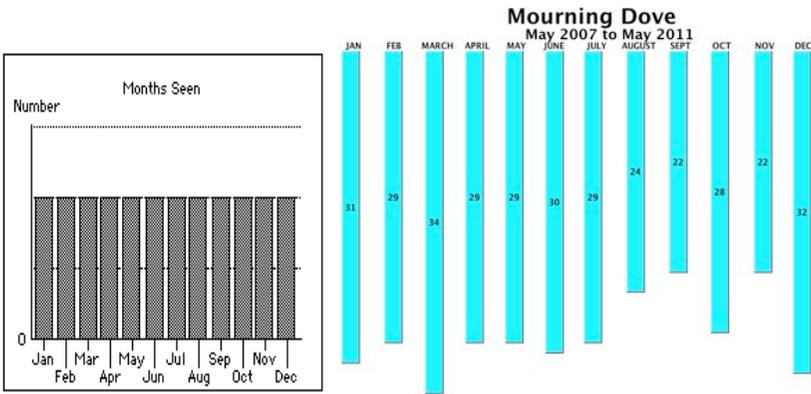
Other Sites to Try:

Everywhere.

In the first unfinished version of this book, I made an idealized graph to show how I believed the mourning dove might have been represented had it been recorded on every trip. The 1995-2011 graph above now seems to be straightening out with the years of more consistent entries and today more closely resembles that idealized graph. I have just made a quick graph of the sightings from May 2007 to May 2011, and the data are displayed in a way even more in keeping with the idealized graph on the left (below).

The very flat top of the graph on the left was, I realize now, unrealistic. There would always be variation in the numbers of the bird seen in each month for no better reason than the number of trips to the site each month would vary.

Idealized Database Graph Real Database Graph May 2007 to May 2011



Identification: This most common dove has a pointed tail and makes a whistling *wheep! wheep! wheep! wheep! wheep!* sound at take-off. There are gray-black, almond-shaped spots on the wings. Often seen flying high and fast. Call is a plaintive *who^{oo}, hoo, hoo, hoo*, the second note higher than the first and the three last notes always sung slowly and mournfully in descending pitch. An expert at causing misidentification when it flies, the mourning dove will often glide with wings rounded and stiff to make you think you're seeing a hawk. On a whim, it may take flight and make sharp turns, zig-zagging like a snipe, or seem to be nearly any other kind of bird.

Author's Notes:

This bird's call is perhaps my favorite bird song of all. When I lived in Mexico City, the tamale cart would come by. It had a steam-powered whistle that sounded a little like the morning dove.

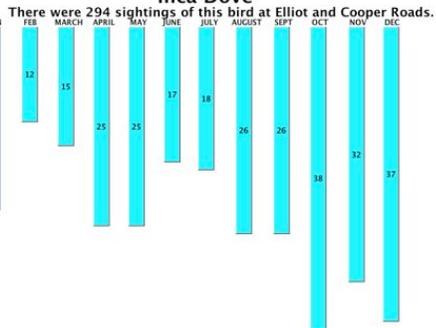
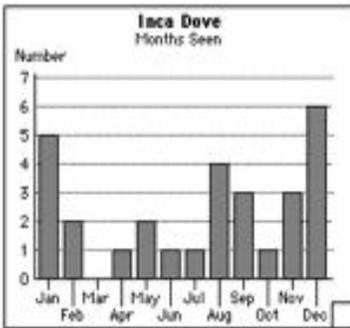
But no tamale cart or musical staff could replicate the doleful, beautiful lament of the mourning dove: two melancholy notes followed by three—always three—descending tones that seem to express both despondency and a contented resignation against the lazy quiet of a summer afternoon.

Look for these birds flying high and fast, northwestward in the evening and to the southeast in the morning. They are at home even in the rocky canyons and arroyos of South Mountain Park. Often I have hiked up Pima Canyon when the temperature is 112 degrees or more and found these birds out there in the silent granite arroyos perched on the ground or in the dry mesquite trees. They have dark, almond-shaped chips on their wings, a simple design that is aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Because of its teeming numbers, people often forget how good a bird this is.

INCA DOVE

1995-2003 Database: 29 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 294 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		4	9	10	1	2	10	31	14	12	28	7	40	97	28

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The first graph should indicate sightings for March as the bird is likely present. The bird was not recorded on every visit because it is a common bird, but it

is not as common at the site as the mourning dove and may not be seen on many visits. It was the ten thousandth bird seen at the site.

Other Sites to Try: Most everywhere—particularly in suburban neighborhoods.

Identification: A fairly tame, tiny bird, the Inca dove makes a rattling, papery sound on take-off—like someone whipping a toy pinwheel through the air. It's tiny, light in color, and scaled on the back. Look for ruddy feathers in the wings in flight and white in the long tail. Call is unmistakable: a long series of monotonous two-note calls sounding like *whirlpool! whirlpool! whirlpool!*

Author's Notes:

On the occasions that I have happened to catch and pick up an Inca dove, I found that they have a strong and distinctive animal smell something akin to a mixture of sagebrush and musk. The bird's call is one of the most common sounds of suburban neighborhoods in the Valley.

While the Inca dove is one of the most common back yard birds in the Valley, it is not nearly as common at Elliot and Cooper Roads. Whenever I find myself wondering why I haven't seen a common bird at the site, curiosity gets the better of me and I go check the database where I have created a "Dry Spell" button. The Inca dove, I find, has been missing from the records for as much as 59 consecutive days. The record was in 1998:

Trip 62,6/27/1998, Elliot and Cooper Roads The Inca dove has not been seen for 59 visits.

Trip 348,04/21/2002, Elliot and Cooper Roads The Inca dove has not been seen for 53 visits.

Trip 404,02/08/2003, Elliot and Cooper Roads The Inca dove has not been seen for 50 visits...

It is perhaps more interesting to look at a less common bird and see how long you might expect to have to wait to see another at the site. The solitary sandpiper is an uncommon bird at the site having only 13 sightings in 1063 visits or 1.22 percent of visits. How long might you expect to have to wait to see it again? The Dry Spell Button shows that the longest wait was 531 consecutive visits:

Trip 1040,4/19/2011, Elliot and Cooper Roads The solitary sandpiper has not been seen for 531 visits.

I have only recorded birds at Strawberry, Arizona nine times, and have seen the common raven there only once. A similar “dry spell” search gives a clear picture of how often the bird was seen at Strawberry, Arizona and on which trip.

05/16/2002 The common raven hasn't been seen in 1 visit.

05/17/2002 The common raven hasn't been seen in 2 visits.

08/08/2004 The common raven hasn't been seen in 3 visits.

08/10/2005 The common raven hasn't been seen in 4 visits.

08/13/2006 The common raven was PRESENT.

05/25/2007 The common raven hasn't been seen in 1 visit.

08/15/2008 The common raven hasn't been seen in 2 visits.

05/27/2009 The common raven hasn't been seen in 3 visits.

8/8/2010 The common raven hasn't been seen in 4 visits.

BLACK-HOODED PARAKEET

1995-2011 Database: 1 Sighting Black-hooded Parakeet

There was but 1 sighting of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

JAN FEB MARCH APRIL MAY JUNE JULY AUGUST SEPT OCT NOV DEC

1

Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
																1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: A rare sighting of a South American bird that has become feral in the valley.

Other Sites to Try:

The Research Park at Elliot and Price Roads.

Identification: This green, yellow, and blue bird has red “pant legs,” a pointed tail, and a black face.

Author's Notes:

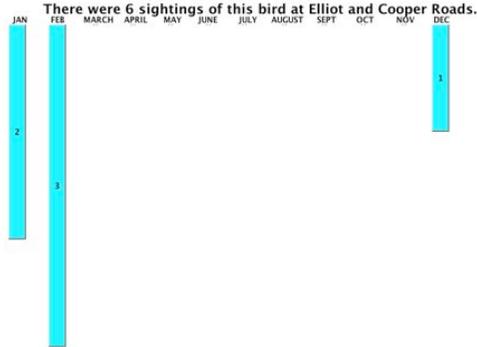
Black-hooded Parakeet, 4/12/2011, Elliot and Cooper Roads, I heard some loud screeching and saw three of these fly up on the island in Pond Ten. They didn't stay long but flew west-northwest. I took two pictures.

I posted the pictures on Facebook, and a birder commented “What!?” I investigated a bit and found that a flock of three birds

had been present for many years at the Research Park and that someone also saw a flock of seven more recently suggesting that they have begun to breed. I wonder if the three I saw were the originals or not, and I wonder why they flew the five miles to Elliot and Cooper Roads.

PEACH-FACED LOVEBIRD

1995-2011 Database: 6 Sightings
Peach-faced Lovebird



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
															1	5

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The bird has finally shown up at Elliot and Cooper Roads after a 15-year dry spell.

Other Sites to Try:

Peace Park in Tempe, Arizona State University, and the Water Ranch are good places to see this bird.

Identification: Hard to mistake this very colorful bird. It has a pink face, a green and yellow body, and a blue rump. There is color variation in some individuals. Its voice is loud, and the bird will often call attention to itself with it.

Author's Notes:

I once commented to a friend that this parrot was so colorful that it looked out of place in the dry desert landscape of the Water Ranch. He said that when he visited Africa and saw the bird in its natural habitat, it looked completely out of place there too.

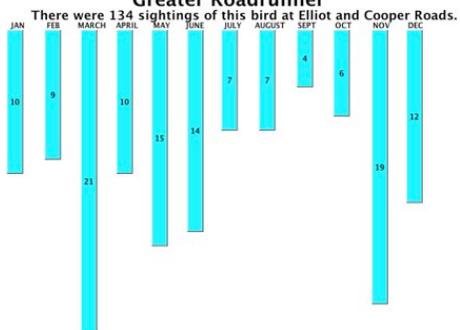
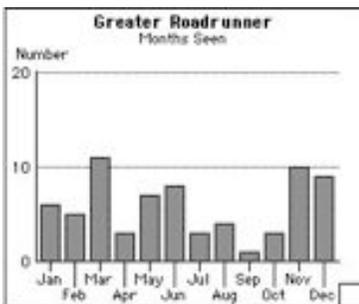
Peace Park in Tempe has a canal at its side with mature cottonwood trees along it. The canal used to be one of my favorite haunts when I was a boy. My father once told me he knew someone who had counted all the birds there. I believe he said the birder even recorded a Bohemian waxwing there. At any rate, the park is a good place to see lovebirds. Once, I went there and the minister of the church next to the park told me he had seen a flock of “green parrots” numbering in the hundreds at the park.

Peach-faced Lovebird, 10/04/2000, Peace Park, Yes I saw these. The minister there had told me about them though he didn't know what they were. Yes there were many. Later the minister couldn't remember me and when I went there he came up to see if I was up to no good.

GREATER ROADRUNNER

1995-2003 Database: 70 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 134 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	2		23	16	12	7	8	6	21	12	3	8	2	9	5	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Common at the site. Seen all months of the year. This is an excellent place to see the roadrunner. It has been sighted in most areas of the site, but perhaps the bird's favorite of haunts is along the canal road between Pond 1 and Pond 6 on either side of the chain-link fence.

Other Sites to Try: Baseline and Power Roads, Pima Canyon, and the Water Ranch.

Identification: Unmistakeable because of its very large size and behavior of running on the ground. Has an obvious crest. Rarely flies. Note the very long tail. Look across the ponds on the dirt roads this bird seems to like.

Author's Notes:

My father always hated the Arizona Game and Fish Department. He once showed me an article in a Game and Fish publication. It was entitled, "The Roadrunner. The Clown of the Desert."

The story told of how a rattlesnake would take a snooze out in the noonday sun and how the roadrunner (that clown of the desert) would sneak up and build a ring of cholla around him. Now the rattlesnake, so the article went, cannot cross over cholla and the roadrunner knows it but the snake *doesn't*, so when the roadrunner wakes the snake up, the snake slithers away and gets stuck on the cholla spines, and the roadrunner takes advantage of his preoccupation and pecks his head off.

I can still hear my dad: "Oh, Geez! Those rattlers *do* like to take naps—and right in the noonday sun where their temperature

will go up to 190 degrees. What utter nonsense! And isn't that *clownish* of the roadrunner to peck off the snake's head? He haggles the snake's head clean off, that clown—that CLOWN of the desert!"

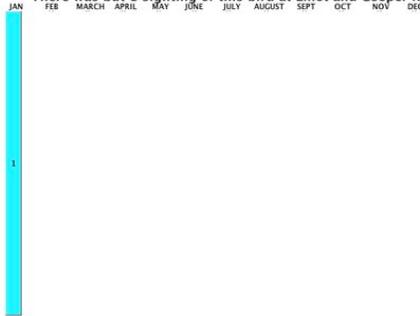
The roadrunner's technique for killing the rattlesnake is similar to my technique for killing alligators. My method also relies on distraction. You just leave the Sunday paper down by the swamp. Then you come back, sneak up, and club the gator over the head while he's clipping coupons.

GREAT HORNED OWL

1995-2011 Database: 1 Sighting

Great Horned Owl

There was but 1 sighting of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
													1			

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Extremely rare at the site. It took me 700 visits to see this, the first and only owl in the database for this site.

Other Sites to Try:

I have seen this bird most often in Pima Canyon and in the Superstition Mountains.

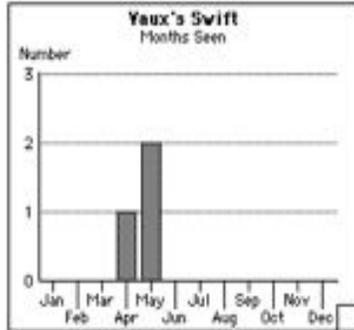
Identification: It is hard to misidentify this giant, horned owl.

Author's Notes:

This bird was seen on my 700th trip to Elliot and Cooper Roads. It was sitting in the deciduous tree on the very southwest corner of the site.

VAUX'S SWIFT

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				3												

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

The only other sightings in the database are in Flagstaff, Arizona; McQueen and Elliot Roads; and Yucatán, Mexico.

Identification: The Vaux’s swift can be described in the same way that the chimney swift is described—as a flying cigar.

Author's Notes:

At first glance, it seems surprising that this bird has been sighted three times while the much more common white-throated swift is yet to be added to the database for Elliot and Cooper Roads. However, the white-throated swift likes cliffs and canyons

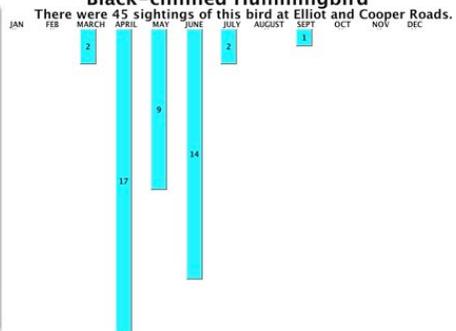
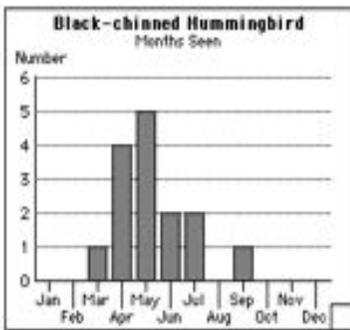
and even rocky buttes. I know them a lot better than I do Vaux's swifts, and so I take this opportunity to digress and write about them here.

At the Botanical Gardens in Phoenix, there is a rocky desert hill, and the white-throated swifts can often be seen swarming around it. The same is true of the cliffs on the side of Tempe Butte (A Mountain). The white-throated swift appears suddenly and unexpectedly at Pima Canyon. Well up on the hills amid the most spectacular desert beauty of rocks and cacti, I have often been lucky enough to have these swifts appear and streak overhead. Convergent evolution has created a bird much like the only distantly related violet-green swallow in habits and appearance—but the pointed tail and wings of the white-throated swift make misidentification unlikely. At the Grand Canyon, the white-throated swift makes a jet-like sound in the air as it rockets along the cliffs. At Usery Mountain Park from the highest part of the mountain, I have seen them streaking by and marveled at their spectacular speed, their incredible strength, and the tireless power of their flight.

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 15 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 45 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				6	4	3	2		5	5	3	5		3	8	1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: April, May, and June seem to be good times to see this bird. Absent October through February in both databases.

Other Sites to Try: Twenty-nine records exist in the database for the Water Ranch and three at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Identification: It is hard to tell the difference between the female Anna's and the female black-chinned hummer. On the black-chinned, there is a clean division between the dark throat and the white breast that is clearly seen as a line. Purple on the throat with white below confirms the male black-chinned. Less common by far than the Anna's hummingbird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

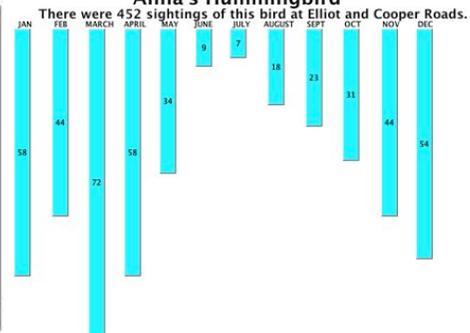
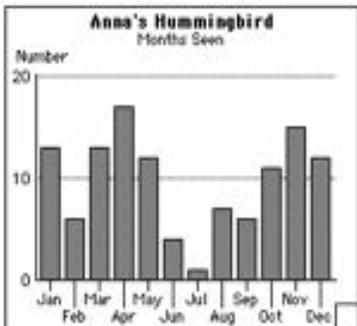
Author's Notes:

Just a record from the database for this one:

Black-chinned Hummingbird, 4/3/1998, Verde River, This bird had a nest of eggs. Larry pulled the branch down to look in and I thought he'd let go and the eggs would go sailing! They didn't.

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 117 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 452 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1	1	40	26	23	13	10	13	46	37	17	22	17	35	72	79

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Very common at the site. Best area at the site is the walkway behind the fire station near Ponds 8 and 9. Fewer Anna's hummingbirds have been seen at the site in June than black-chinned.

Other Sites to Try:

This is by far the most common local hummingbird. It can be seen in most any Arizonan site mentioned in this book.

Identification: One of the loudest hummers, the Anna's can soon be recognized as a "heard only" even though this intrepid bird is always willing to show himself. It has a hunched, old man posture much of the time, and the male may appear black on the top of the head and below. When the light falls on him, you will see these feathers as a shining red foil.

Author's Notes:

People say that putting out a couple of hummingbird feeders only serves to feed a single bird. A tough little Anna's hummer will stake the area out and guard the feeders as his personal property. Putting in more feeders than a single bird can defend is a better strategy. People tend to think that hummingbirds are timid and skittish, but the fact is that they are fearless. I can't think of any other bird which I can approach as closely—except perhaps the black-tailed gnatcatcher. A backyard database record shows the spirit of the Anna's hummingbird:

Anna's Hummingbird, 12/10/1999, North Villas Lane, Harassing a sharp-shinned hawk

One Sunday in 2006, I made a sighting of an Anna's that turned out to be a real surprise. Here is an e-mail exchange that explains what happened:

Kathe,

I saw what I took to be a male Anna's at the Water Ranch. However, here are my notes on it.

Anna's Hummingbird, 02/19/2006, Greenfield and Guadalupe Roads, very strange and interesting. Its rump had blazing red foil and its rump also had a rectangle of mirror-bright foil, metallic turquoise or sky blue in color.

Have I made a misidentification? Its head was fiery red/orange top and bottom like an Anna's, but what kind of hummer has such a screaming rump? The foil-like turquoise was a long rectangle. It was very bright and pretty and impossible to miss. Is this some other hummer? A mutant?

Yours,

Tom

Hi Tom,

Thanks for the report! You are seeing a bird that was tagged yesterday by an ASU graduate student! They were out collecting hummers and marking them for a study from the bio dept that is looking to find the connections between coloration and mating productivity. At least that's how I understood the explanation! I didn't see any of the tagged birds myself, but now I know what to look for! Prof McGraw from ASU spoke at the last Audubon Soc

meeting about his studies on color in house finches. It was fascinating! He is likely to know more about the hummers, tho I don't think this is his project directly.

Kathe

Kathe,

Do you mean that the tag itself is colorful as I described?

Tom

Tom,

That's what I understood. I didn't see the tags, but I know they were to be very colorful to be spotted easily, and were placed on the back of the bird. Now I'm curious to see one myself. I should have asked how long the tags will adhere.

Kathe

Kathe,

I realize now that the strange rectangular shape was a cut-out piece of some reflective material. I couldn't figure it out! Well, I think this is very interesting although I'm a little disappointed that I haven't discovered the turquoise-rumped hummer.

Tom

Tom,

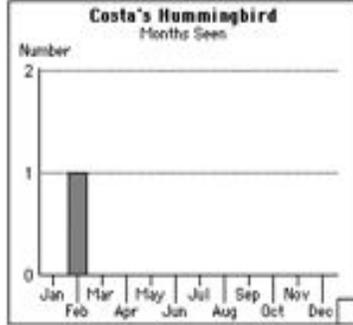
I could be all wrong and maybe you have discovered a new hummer! I sure appreciate your letting me know—I bet you won't be the only one to have questions, and now I'm better prepared!

Kathe

Later, I saw the tagged bird again, and I was surprised that I had been fooled. The tag was obviously a cut-out rectangle of paper stuck to the bird.

COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
							1									

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try: Records exist in the database for Pima Canyon, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, and the Superstition Mountains.

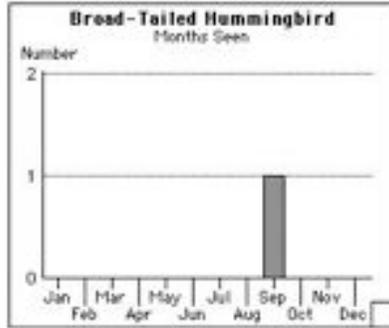
Identification: The male is easy to identify by his violet crown and throat and the long side feathers on the throat.

Author's Notes:

In the Superstition Mountains on March 26, 2011, I was hiking when I heard a rattlesnake to the right of the trail. He didn't like me passing by and was curled and ready to strike. A Costa's hummingbird buzzed over my shoulder and hovered like a dragonfly directly in front of the snake. He got quite close to the snake and dallied for a time before he buzzed away. I wondered how often hummingbirds might get bitten if they did this habitually. This Costa's violet throat was actually a purple violet that made me think of the black-chinned hummingbird. The long side feathers on the neck, however, made identification sure.

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
							1									

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

I have seen them at my home, at the Polytechnic Campus of ASU, in Flagstaff, and near the Hassayampa River.

Identification: There is a rufous color to the female along its sides, but males and females have a green back while the male rufous hummingbird's back is completely rufous in color.

Author's Notes:

When I first saw this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads, I thought it was a rufous hummingbird, which is not at all as common in the Valley as the broad-tailed.

The rufous hummer is an old friend from my youth when I rouged cotton in the fields from Wickenburg to Safford. I remember so clearly how the rufous would rocket over our heads, its feathers blazing red and orange—the bird almost like a puff of fluorescent yarn. The bird in the database brings to mind how the

soil of the fields in Safford, Arizona differed from most of the others in the state; they were full of Indian pottery.

An entry from those summer days so long ago reads:

Cotton Fields Safford Arizona Sunday, August 8, 1971

Swainson's Hawk, 8/8/1971, Cotton Fields Safford Arizona

Rufous Hummingbird, 8/8/1971, Cotton Fields Safford Arizona

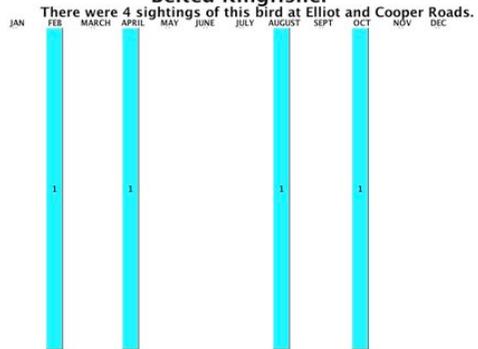
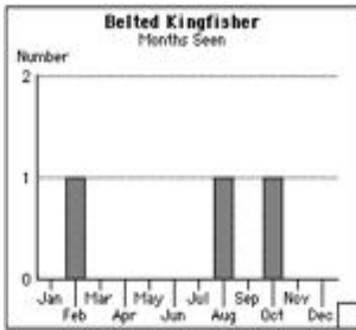
Abert's Towhee, 8/8/1971, Cotton Fields Safford Arizona

Blue Grosbeak, 8/8/1971, Cotton Fields Safford Arizona

BELTED KINGFISHER

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 4 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				2			1		1							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not often seen at the site.

Other Sites to Try: The database has records for the Water Ranch (especially in Pond 1), Baseline and Power Roads, and the Verde River.

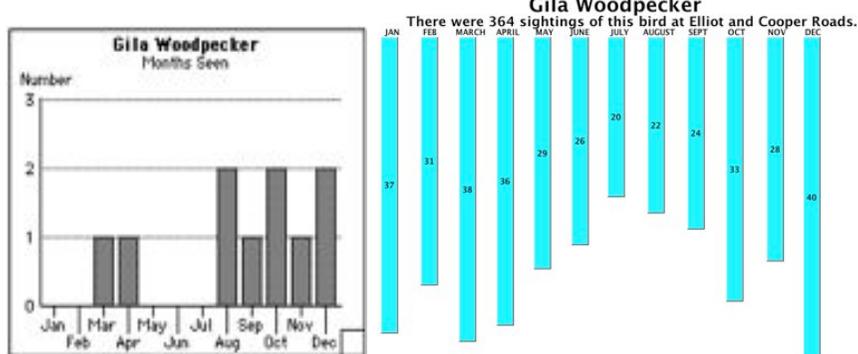
Identification: This is a very big, blue and white, crested bird with a white throat and neck band. The female has rufous markings that extend from its sides under the wings. The bird will perch on a conspicuous branch and fly out to hover and dive for minnows.

Author's Notes:

When we first came to Arizona in 1958, Tempe was a small town, and just south of Broadway was our house. If you went much farther south, you hit cotton fields and a place we called the Cottonwoods. The Cottonwoods was simply a canal lined by giant, mature cottonwood trees. Beyond it, the cotton fields stretched away and were lost in the haze. The Cottonwoods was a perfect haunt for the belted kingfisher. I don't mean to say that I saw any kingfishers there, but I could have. In the 1960s, however, there was a down-and-out series of low-rent huts in Tempe along a rather less inviting canal. The place was called Star Camp, and it was there that I remember seeing a kingfisher diving from a cottonwood into the water.

GILA WOODPECKER

1995-2003 Database: 10 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 364 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				2	4		1	4	21	17	9	26	14	41	138	87

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The Gila woodpecker is very common in residential areas such as those that surround the Elliot and Cooper Roads site, but from 1995 to 2003 it was surprisingly scarce at the site. I never could think of a reason for this to be so. The graph on the left above matches my memory of this scarcity. In later years, it became very common at the site.

Other Sites to Try: Almost anywhere nearby. Most neighborhoods surrounding the site are good places to see the Gila.

Identification: The Gila woodpecker's call sounds like someone's repeatedly squeezing a rubber ducky or a cat's toy mouse to produce the thin *squeak! squeak! squeak! squeak! squeak!* The black-necked stilt occasionally makes a similar scolding call, so look to see that there are none around if you plan to make a heard-only record. The bird has a tan head, neck, and breast and a black and white striped back. The male Gila has a red crown. Look for white wing patches and white rump during the typical up and down roller coaster flight of this woodpecker. The ladder-backed woodpecker does not have the white wing patches.

Author's Notes:

Gila Woodpecker, 3/28/1998, North Villas Lane, A male with the bright red spot on his head. He was under my orange tree eating a fallen orange. He was pecking it. He was making a hole and was eating the pulp out of the orange. Vitamin C. Oh what a good view I had of him. He even crawled up the trunk of the orange tree.

I remember my orange tree now. It was an Arizona orange and produced blood oranges, ones that have spots of red in the pulp. I remember now that one year it ceased to thrive. The people at the nursery sold me some tree spikes to hammer into the ground to

nurse it back to health. It finally died anyway and is now just a memory brought back to me by a note in the database.

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER

1995-2011 Database: 2 Sightings
Ladder-backed Woodpecker

There were 2 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
															1	1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try: Boyce Thompson Arboretum, the Water Ranch, Pima Canyon, the Superstition Mountains, and Mount Ord.

Identification: The white feathers, lack of any tan coloring, and black and white facial pattern easily distinguish the bird from the Gila woodpecker. It has no white wing patches. The male's crown, as is true of many woodpeckers, is red.

Author's Notes:

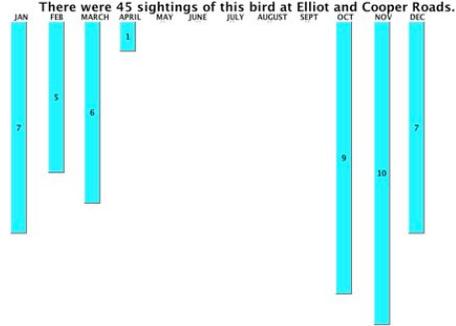
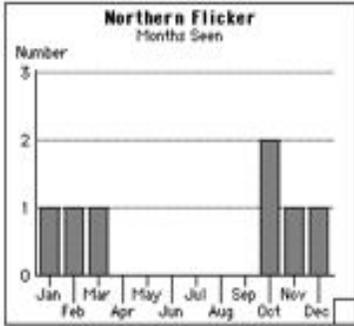
My first record of the bird is in 1971 and I have recorded it 29 times in all. I remember seeing this bird at an outdoor dinner we had. I created the following record:

*Ladder-backed Woodpecker, 05/09/2001, Generic
Place Anywhere, Botanical Gardens for cycle dinner.*

NORTHERN FLICKER

1995-2003 Database: 7 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 45 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1		4	1	1	1	4	3	1	5	1		15	8

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

The overall absence of the bird from April to September is interesting to note as it perfectly matches the seasonal range shown in the book *Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County Arizona*. My extra visits to the site after retirement are very likely responsible for the larger number of sightings in 2010 and 2011. The number for 2011 only represents half a year of trips as the database was archived in May of that year. Since I waited to archive the data until I had been retired for a full year, the bar graph has not been skewed by the extra visits and each month is correctly represented.

Other Sites to Try: Records exist in the database for every nearby site.

Identification: The red-shafted is by far the most likely flicker for the site as the gilded flicker has been seen here only once. This large woodpecker has a white rump visible in flight. It is heavily marked with dark spots on the sides and breast. It has a red mustache and large black bib. Red wing feathers should be visible when it flies.

Author's Notes:

Scientists lumped the yellow-shafted, red-shafted, and gilded flickers into one species: the common flicker. Later, the gilded flicker was re-split and is now its own species. In places like Pima Canyon, the gilded flicker is most often seen. The flashes of yellow on the wings in flight distinguish it from the red-shafted race of the northern flicker.

GILDED FLICKER

**1995-2011 Database: 1 Sighting
Gilded Flicker**

There was but 1 sighting of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
										1						

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Extremely rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try: Pima Canyon is by far the best site I know.

Identification: The gilded flicker has been described as a yellow-shafted flicker with a red-shafted flicker’s head. The gilded, then, has the gray face and the red mustache of the red-shafted and the yellow flight feathers of the yellow-shafted.

Author's Notes:

My notes show that I had a visitor when this bird was seen. I have no recollection of it at all except in the database.

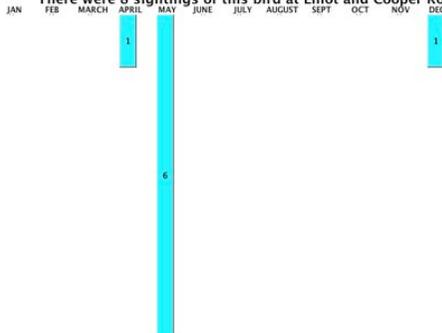
When the three races of the northern flicker were lumped into a single species, many bird watchers like me lost two birds on their life list. I was glad to hear that the scientific consensus was to split the gilded flicker and make it a separate species once again. In places like Pima Canyon, the gilded flicker is the one most often seen. The flashes of yellow on the wings in flight distinguish it from the red-shafted race of the northern flicker.

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE

1995-2011 Database: 8 Sightings

Western Wood-Pewee

There were 8 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
									1						3	4

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: In the last two years, it has been seen more often than in the past, but this is likely because of the extra visits I made to the site after retirement.

Other Sites to Try:

There are sightings listed for Patagonia, Arizona in 2000, 2005, and 2007. The bird was only seen twice at the Water Ranch and twice at Peace Park in Tempe. In a number of different places such as Tucson and Flagstaff, I have recorded it only once.

Identification: A small, dark flycatcher with wing bars but lacks the very distinct eye ring of the *Empidonaxes*.

Author's Notes:

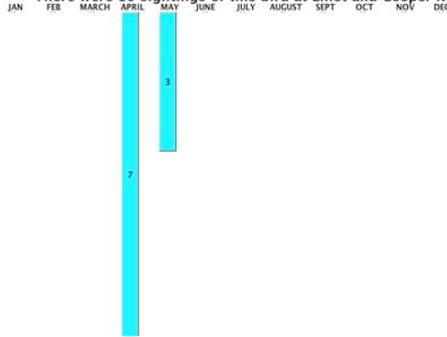
Western Wood-Pewee, 09/25/2001, Peace Park, I've seen him before here on the wire above the canal. The canal was running. He had no eye ring. Very powerful little bird but not so much so as the last time I saw him.

Western Wood-Pewee, 5/20/2010, Elliot and Cooper Roads, There were four or five of these hanging around. Very dark. Spunky. I took pictures.

GRAY FLYCATCHER

1995-2011 Database: 10 Sightings
Gray Flycatcher

There were 10 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
												4				6

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Not common at the site although in 2011 I saw the bird six times. April and May sightings conform to range maps from other sources.

Other Sites to Try: Pima Canyon

Identification: This *Empidonax* flycatcher is not distinguishable from others in appearance but in behavior. Rather than flicking his tail upwards, he pumps it downward in a very obvious manner, so the observer has a solid identification.

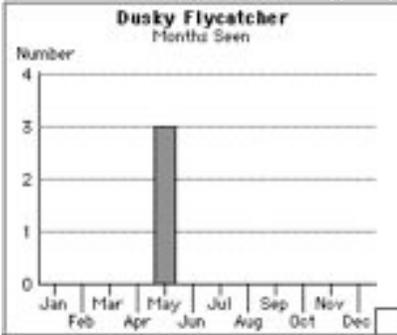
Author's Notes:

Gray Flycatcher, 03/14/2007, Pima Canyon, Pumped its tail. Steve and I went at around noon. Nice. Not many people around. We went over towards the Javelina Trail and then went up an arroyo and looked at a mine. Then we went up on a ridge and

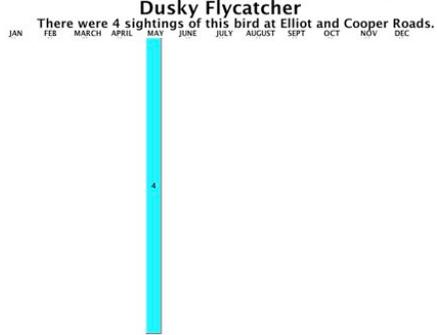
down. There was some guy far below us with a hood and sweatsuit. What a nut.

DUSKY FLYCATCHER

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings



1995-2011 Database: 4 Sightings



There were 4 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				1	2				1							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

All sightings were in May.

Other Sites to Try: I have the bird recorded several times at Pima Canyon.

Identification: *Empidonax* flycatchers like the dusky are notoriously difficult to identify. My identification of this one has often been with the assistance of true experts in that it was reported at the site and I went over and saw it. Birds of the genus *Empidonax* genus are plain-looking flycatchers with wing bars and eye rings.

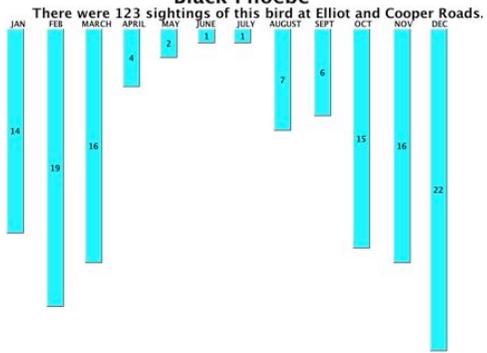
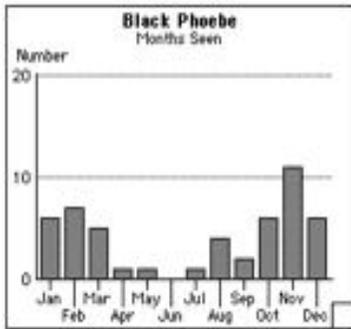
Author's Notes:

I used to have an *Empidonax* flycatcher option in the database but I changed it to Generic Flycatcher. Many people simply record *Empidonax* as an identification, but since only the genus rather than the species has been determined, the bird technically shouldn't go on a life list.

BLACK PHOEBE

1995-2003 Database: 50 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 123 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		7	7	15	11	7	7	22	6	3	7	3	3	13	11

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Fairly common at the site. The decrease in sightings from April to July has remained constant for all the years.

Other Sites to Try:

This is a common bird at many sites—especially near water. Most all of the sites I have visited regularly have records for this bird. Look for him near the shores and banks of lakes and rivers where he will sit on a branch and wait for flying insects.

Identification: This black above and light below bird has a saddle shoe appearance that makes it easy to identify. It has the only slightly crested head of many flycatchers.

Author's Notes:

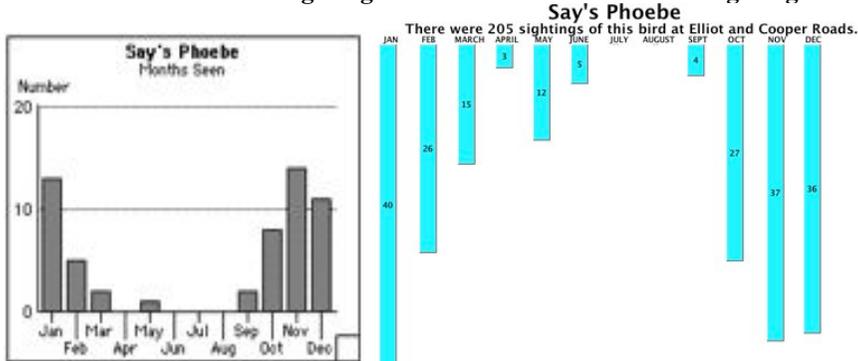
I have a Zen-like note in the database for this bird at the site:

Black Phoebe, 12/20/2010, Elliot and Cooper Roads, Canal Road at the most easterly pond. He called. I looked. He was there.

SAY'S PHOEBE

1995-2003 Database: 56 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 205 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			15	20	14	5	2	5	14	11	8	9	6	15	48	33

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Seen a bit more often than the black phoebe but missing entirely in July and August.

Other Sites to Try:

Look for the Say's phoebe in any of the sites mentioned in this book.

Identification: Look for the peach colored breast and the dark tail.

Author's Notes:

My father and mother spent months at a time in a lonely beach house some ways from Puerto Peñasco, Sonora, Mexico. He wrote a series of short pieces about the place. One he entitled, "Say's Bird" and I include it here as a guest essay.

Say's Bird

By Gerald Ainsworth Cole

Catching up on one's sleep is an important bonus enjoyed when making a visit to the beach house. There is no traffic hum, no blaring music, no overhead jet engines. True, there are times when roaring surf wakes us up after midnight, but that is an enjoyable experience. It takes a few sleepy moments to comprehend, to identify the noise, but then the sleep lost is not important; the wild roar of the breaking waves is exciting and rewarding.

In the springtime, however, something else interrupts the valued slumber. Before dawn on some March day a repetitious, plaintive bird call awakens us. It is the voice of Say's phoebe, one of the breeding birds of the Estero Morua community. It is the mating season and this flycatcher, no nightingale or skylark by any stretch of imagination, does its best. A flight "song" is part of its vernal rites during the daylight hours, and its mournful notes are usually the last sound we hear at sundown.

We see this bird on almost every visit to the beach, but there is a brief time in late summer, after the young have fledged and have become independent, when it is absent. The dunes seem deserted without it hawking insects from a saltbush sally point, flicking and wagging its black tail. Happily, it returns by the end of September,

and we stretch a point and count this species one of the permanent members of our fauna.

It is a remarkable bird when we consider its closest relatives, the black phoebe, also occurring in the Southwest, although but rarely spotted at Estero Morua, and the eastern phoebe. Their nests are never found far from water. How does Say's phoebe survive among the dry dunes with no surface water (except for dew) found within miles?

It is wrong, however, to think of this flycatcher as being typical of the dunes and *Atriplex*, the saltbush. In a recently published book on the birds of Arizona's Grand Canyon, the authors underscored Say's phoebe as occurring in a wide variety of habitats. It is found in the Canyon throughout the year, some pairs beginning to nest on cliff ledges along the Colorado River in April. It appears in most parts of the Park from the river banks to the Kaibab Plateau, at an altitude of more than 8,000 feet (2,440 meters, if you prefer) above the Estero Morua beach. It is a versatile bird that the Grand Canyon authors consider useless as an "indicator species," typical of one particular Life Zone.

At Estero Morua, there are no suitable rocky ledges to serve as nesting sites for phoebes. Instead, they build their nests and raise the young broods in carports, ramadas and other man-made structures. The most remarkable of these can be seen across the estuary to the north, the white dot that is Chuck's boat. Once we hiked across the estuary at low tide to visit the lonely relic. As we approached the stranded boat, a bird flew out of the cabin. Yes, Say's phoebe had found a satisfactory nesting site.

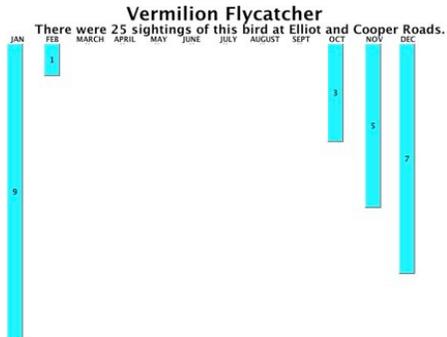
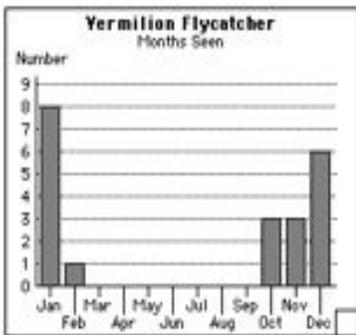
But back to the mournful pre-dawn and crepuscular calls. Does the bird sing, "phoebe?" Not at all. Not even close. Had European naturalists, by some fluke, come first to North America via the west coast, our three closely related phoebes would not share that name; only the eastern phoebe calls our "fee-bee, fee-bee." Sometimes we think, however, that a Greek scholar could be happy with Say's phoebe's name here at Estero Morua. In the early morning, perched on the tip of a saltbush near our porch its soft

peach-colored breast is highlighted by the eastern sun. The bird shines—*phoibos*, radiant.

The scientific name of this bird, however, is especially engaging *Sayornis saya*. The two other phoebes share the generic name, *Sayornis*, Say's bird, but our Estero Morua resident gets a double dose. Thomas Say was an all around naturalist collecting and describing mollusks (about 30 freshwater clams and snails alone), insects, and crustaceans from the environs of his 19th century native Philadelphia, south to Florida. In addition, he traveled and sampled the fauna in the western United States and Mexico. He brought back specimens of the flycatcher that subsequently was named for him. Is any other bird so bogged down with one man's name? Can any other bird match that? I know but one, Bulwer's petrel, *Bulweria bulweria*, named for an English clergyman, Rev. James Bulwer. But don't look for it out over the Gulf waters as you walk along the beach—it belongs to the Atlantic. You'll have to be content with Say's bird.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER

1995-2003 Database: 21 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 25 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		1	11	9										3	1	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Not nearly as common at the site as it used to be before houses were built next to the ponds. It used to sit on the old south fence that divided the pond area from the open fields.

Other Sites to Try:

Drive down Power Road to the Salt River. This is one of the best places around to see the vermilion flycatcher. Coon's Bluff and the convergence of the Salt and Verde rivers are even better.

Identification: The bright red color of the male makes it hard to misidentify. The female, however, can be tricky as you might at first take it for an *Empidonax* flycatcher or some other unidentifiable, drab flycatcher.

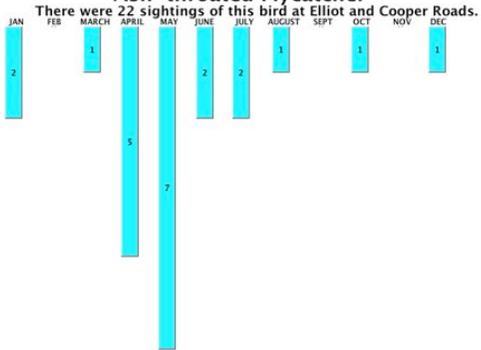
Author's Notes:

On several occasions, I have seen vermilion flycatcher feathers in the main viewing area behind the fire station. They lay on the cement floor below the large "telephone" pole that supports one end of the viewing area's roof. By the remains of the flycatcher on the floor and the tell-tale guano that was also there, I felt that a predatory bird—perhaps an owl—was roosting on top of the pole where it met the roof. I drove out to the site at night a couple of times but found no owl there. Perhaps he was out hunting.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER

1995-2003 Database: 9 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 22 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				2	2		4	1		1		3	1	1	3	4

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

The numerous sightings from April to May make its graph look more like the gray flycatcher's than either of the phoebes' graphs which show them in cooler months.

Other Sites to Try:

Pima Canyon in South Mountain Park, the Water Ranch, the Superstition Mountains, the Verde River, Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Identification: Shaped much like like a say's phoebe but is more obviously crested and plainer looking in its brownish color, and it lacks the peach-colored breast. It has a *purr! purr!* call that is easy to recognize. Its tail is much more chocolaty in color than the Western Kingbird's but the bird can get pretty yellow underneath.

Author's Notes:

The first sighting of the bird brings back to me a forgotten foray.

Ash-throated Flycatcher, 12/30/1992, Research Park, Got this entry from my journal and it said that Dad and I went to the research park to look for towhees on December 30 1992. Saw no towhees.

The record is meaningful first in that it reminds me of how I wanted to go see the Abert's towhee somewhere. Thus, the Abert's towhee must have been hard to find in 1992. Today it is a common backyard bird of mine and second only to the mourning dove in number of sightings at Elliot and Cooper Roads. Secondly, I am reminded of how infrequently I have gone to the Research Park even though this area of ponds is only one mile from my house. My "Trips to Places" button shows only the following visits there:

Trip 1, 12/30/1992, Research Park

Trip 2, 09/29/2001, Research Park

Trip 3, 01/22/2005, Research Park

Trip 4, 5/24/2010, Research Park

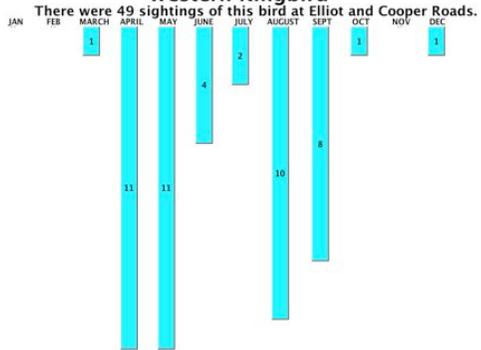
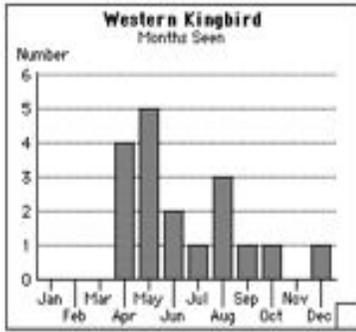
It's a good place to get an odd duck like a lesser scaup, and the black-hooded Parakeet has been sighted there, but it's a very sterile environment that isn't inviting to me as a bird watcher. Here's what I wrote on my last visit.

***Research Park 5/24/2010** I went over and it took some time to find a parking place. I have been here but three times before and now I know why. It's boring and not a good place.*

WESTERN KINGBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 18 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 49 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		1	4	2	7	1	3		2	2	5	9		3	4	6

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Mostly absent November through March.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch is often good. Also, drive down rural roads as though you were looking for kestrels or red-tailed hawks. This flycatcher may be roosting on the power lines.

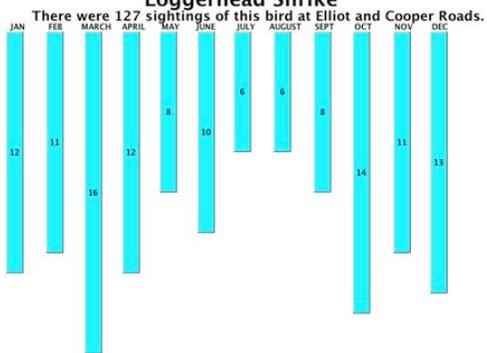
Identification: The slightly crested look of the bird and upright perching stance make it unmistakably a flycatcher, and its size is akin to that of an ash-throated flycatcher, which has little yellow and browner browns. The yellowness is a good thing to look for. The white outer tail feathers of the adult are also a good field mark, but if you don't see them, it doesn't mean you're looking at a Cassin's kingbird. The Cassin's is not likely to be in the area. It is likely an immature western.

Author's Notes:

For Ken Kaufman, the legendary birder, the western kingbird was the inspiration for his obsession with bird watching. His *Kingbird Highway*, by the way, is an excellent read that teaches you a great deal about the subject and the monomania (He might prefer the word focus.) that has characterized his career and that has possessed me to write down by hand 13,318 birds on a single street corner. For the great Roger Tory Peterson, the bird that started it all was a woodpecker. For me, as you have read, it was the long-billed dowitcher.

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE

1995-2003 Database: 79 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 127 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		20	15	24	12	5	7	16	16	5		2	2	1	1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Present all year and in the early years was fairly common. Has become far less common after 2006.

Other Sites to Try:

Has been seen in most of the sites mentioned in this book from deserts to lakes, rivers, and canyons.

Identification: Like a mockingbird, but heavier and hunched in posture with a black mask and heavy, hooked beak. Perches on wires or high branches in the open. Color is gray, black, and white. Look for a bird that falls from its perch to fly fast and low across the ground and then swoop up to another perch.

Author's Notes:

The loggerhead shrike is interesting because it is such a tough bird. When asked to describe it, I always say, "Imagine a stocky mockingbird with a black mask, a heavy, hooked beak, the coloration of a saddle shoe, and a bad 'tude." The shrike flies low over the ground with rapid wing beats before it flies up to a perch from which it can hunt mice, sparrows, grasshoppers, or lizards.

One can't help but find shrikes fascinating because they impale their prey on barbed wire or thorns. My father once told me of a place where he saw a long stretch of barbed wire fence with a lizard, a grasshopper, or a mouse stuck on nearly every barb. Dogs bury bones; shrikes make desert sushi. I used to look for mice impaled on the chain link fences at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Mouse Impaled on a Fence at Elliot and Cooper Roads

The 2007 Shrike Decimation

In 2007, I noticed that I was seeing fewer and fewer of these birds. I began to look at my graphs for all places in my database, and it looked as though the bird were moving towards extinction.

Percentage of Shrike Sightings for All Places by Year

Trips in 2005: 263 20 Shrikes Seen on 7.6% of Trips	Trips in 2006: 142 10 Shrikes Seen on 7.04% of Trips	Trips in 2007: 126 2 Shrikes Seen on 1.58% of Trips
--	---	--

I used my “Explore Time!” button to get the number of trips I had made to all places in 2005, 2006, and 2007 and saw that while the large number of trips in 2005 made the 2006 drop in sightings from 20 to 10 seem quite logical, there was no accounting for the very small number of sightings in 2007. Clearly, something began to happen in that year.

While the bird seemed to rally a bit in 2008 and 2009, it has yet to be seen again on as high as 7.6% of trips as it was in 2005, and the 2010 and 2011 figures hardly show an upward trend.

Percentage of Shrike Sightings for All Places by Year

2008	2009	2010	2011
Seen on 4.95% of Trips	Seen on 5.29% of Trips	Seen on 3.13 % of Trips	Seen on 1.33% of Trips

The figures for earlier years are even more telling. They almost always show the bird more prevalent than even in 2005. After 2006, the bird is never seen with any such frequency.

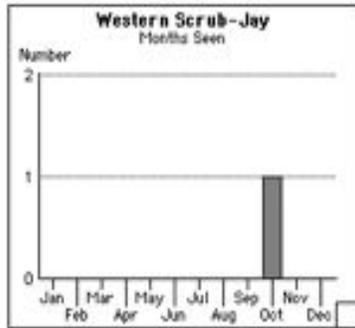
Percentage of Shrike Sightings for All Places by Year

1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Seen on 15% of Trips	Seen on 12% of Trips	Seen on 19% of Trips	Seen on 12% of Trips	Seen on 6.6% of Trips	Seen on 7.3% of Trips	Seen on 11.6% of Trips

The figures would seem to confirm that the 2007 shrike decimation that I began to notice is a very real thing.

WESTERN SCRUB-JAY

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
					1											

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

Records exist in the database for the Tonto Natural Bridge near Payson; Madera Canyon, south of Tucson; the Superstition Mountains; Mount Ord, near Payson; and at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Identification: This blue, crestless jay is the one you are most likely to see in this area.

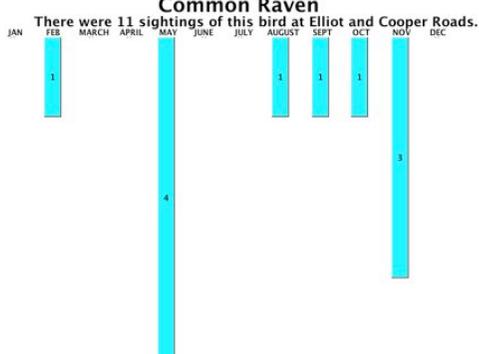
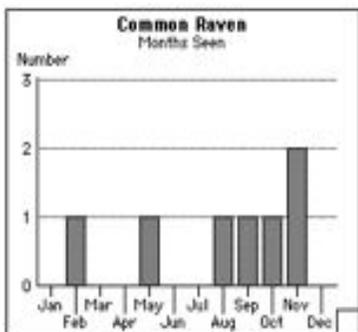
Author's Notes:

It seems to me that scrub-jays used to look more like the picture in the book, with the clear markings and divisions between the colors. Now it has been a number of years since I have seen one that hasn't been kind of ratty looking.

COMMON RAVEN

1995-2003 Database: 7 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 11 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1	1	2		2	1		1		1				2

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: While hardly common at the site, it has been seen there in 8 of the 17 years.

Other Sites to Try:

Ravens have taken up residence at Arizona State University and have nested at the Zoology Building tower. The database has eleven sightings at Boyce Thompson Arboretum. The bird is very common in Flagstaff and much of northern Arizona.

Identification: Large size, solid black color, and wedge-shaped tail make identification of the common raven easy. Soars more and flaps less than a crow.

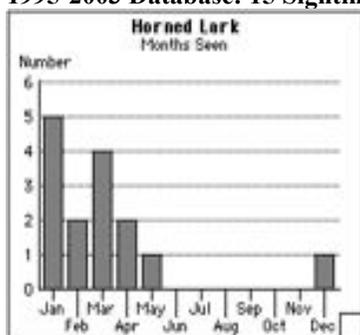
Author's Notes:

Friends and I have often referred to the common raven as the Hualapai eagle because there are so many of them on the Hualapai Indian reservation along and within the Grand Canyon. The first raven that I saw at ASU was on April 25, 2002. It seems a good illustration of the balance of nature that there are really so few ravens on campus. Ravens are so large that they simply snatch squabs from the nest and no adult pigeon can defend its offspring against them. Were there more ravens, the natural supply of squabs and other prey would be depleted and I suppose the ravens themselves would starve.

In the Grand Canyon, the raven will raid a hiker's or a rafter's campsite for food. They are a little like the pesky squirrels that gnaw through your backpack to get the trail mix. People often treat the raven differently from the squirrel: while the squirrel will often do real damage to a pack, hikers do not often throw stones at them. Ravens, however, have a strutting arrogance that I believe is key to making thoughtless people treat these intelligent birds with cruelty.

HORNED LARK

1995-2003 Database: 15 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		8	6												

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Has not been present for twelve years. Horned larks were not uncommon at the site before the housing development filled in the fields that the birds preferred just to the south of Ponds 3, 4, and 9. The bar graph above would have you believe that this bird is not seen during the summer. However, I have a number of records for it in June, July, and August in southern Arizona and elsewhere.

Other Sites to Try:

Anywhere with plowed fields. At the time of this book’s writing, a possible site still exists at McQueen and Elliot Roads, north Mesquite High School. There remains enough undeveloped land to attract these birds there.

Identification: Look for small flocks of low-flying birds with dark tails. On fields, the birds can be seen on the bare berms between furrows. When startled, they fly a short distance and alight. Facial pattern is plain to see through binoculars even at a fair distance. Call sounds like a squeaky metal bolt being quickly unfastened.

Author's Notes:

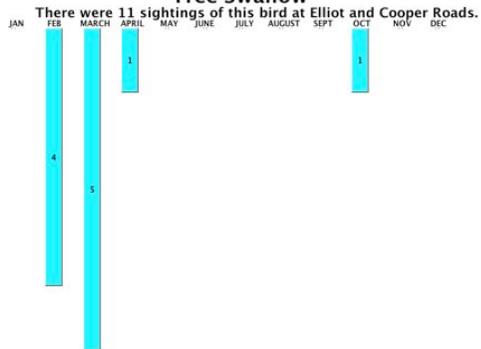
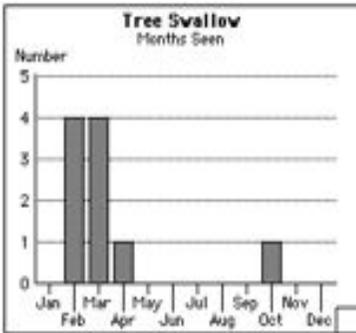
The horned lark is a favorite of mine as I love sparrows and it is rather sparrow-like. They are not always present and so every time I go by a cotton field, I look on the berms to see if I might be lucky enough to see some. From the car, I have often identified them flying low with their dark tails cinching the ID. One sighting has the following note attached to it:

Horned Lark, 12/26/2005, Generic Place in Chandler, LONG THICK FLOCKS FLYING WITH WHITE FLASHES LOW. Field Near the Pump near Mysterious Pond.

TREE SWALLOW

1995-2003 Database: 10 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 11 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1	5	4											1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: This is the least common of all the five species of swallow at the site. A look at the bird numbers page in the beginning of this book shows the following break-down:

Sightings of Swallows at Elliot and Cooper Roads

Northern Rough-winged Swallow 357	Cliff Swallow 65	Barn Swallow 50	Violet-green Swallow 23	Tree Swallow 11
--------------------------------------	---------------------	--------------------	----------------------------	--------------------

Other Sites to Try:

I have one record for Pima Canyon, one for the cotton fields near Wickenburg, Arizona, one over the canal near the Chandler Airport, and one at the old Mesa Sewer Flats. The rest of the sightings were in Maine and Utah.

Identification: This green-backed (or blue-green-backed) swallow has less translucent wings than the more common violet-green species. The white of the tree swallow's face does not extend above its eye. The clearest field mark, however, is the white patches that extend from underneath the bird to the rump. These are far more conspicuous and extend far higher on the rump of the violet-green than on the rump of the tree swallow.

Author's Notes:

Here are some informal notes I attached to the bird on three sightings.

Tree Swallow, 02/28/1998, Generic Place Anywhere, Shiny green back. All of them were very fast and hard to focus on but a lot of fun. On this trip I drove around a lot and saw 40 species. Canal north of the Chandler Airport.

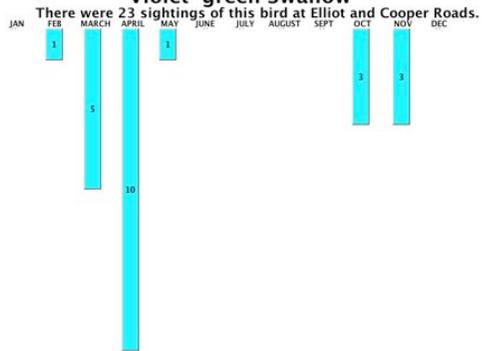
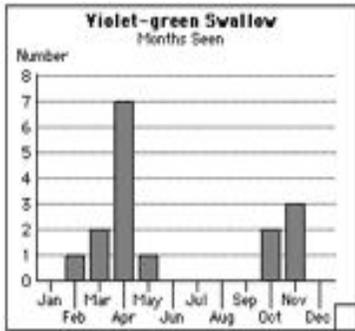
Tree Swallow, 3/7/2011, Elliot and Cooper Roads, saw green backs and the white on the sides was quite small in area. Looking at the back in fact none was visible.

Tree Swallow, 7/30/1971, Cotton Fields Wickenburg Arizona, "Flew by with a shiny BLUE BACK." That's what I wrote but it should be green if it's a tree swallow. Perhaps it was a barn swallow. But wait. They are kind of blue. So this is a good sighting.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW

1995-2003 Database: 16 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 23 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1	4	9		2		2			2		1		2

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not seen in the summer months. April is best.

Other Sites to Try:

Often seen over Boyce Thompson Arboretum's Ayer Lake. Out of 56 visits there, I saw the bird 14 times which is exactly one out of four visits. I have often recorded it in Flagstaff, Arizona, and on each of the four trips I made to Mount Ord, I saw the bird.

Identification: This is the most common green-backed swallow at the site. Its somewhat grassy green in color, and white feathers extend over the rump to almost meet at the top.

Author's Notes:

As part of an essay that I wrote to describe the vacant lot at McQueen and Elliot Roads a mile from Elliot and Cooper, I talked about the violet green swallow and the development of farm land:

Violet green swallows were streaming over the green field. To me they always represented the rural areas. You'd see them only as you drove down these lonely dirt roads that bordered farmland or these lots—never right in your suburban neighborhood.

The passing of this lot will be the same as the passing of all of the ones I have seen for years. From my house, I once could look out far into the mystery to the south. Out there, over the fields, I could see the groves of cottonwood trees and beyond them other fields still that spread across the land onward to the distant horizon. When houses were built on that land, only a few lots remained until they too were filled in with the advancing beige jungle and there was no longer a desert, or a farm, or a vacant lot. Everything was gone, and along with everything else went the long, lonely dirt roads that stretched mile upon mile along the quiet fields with the violet-green swallows flying over them.

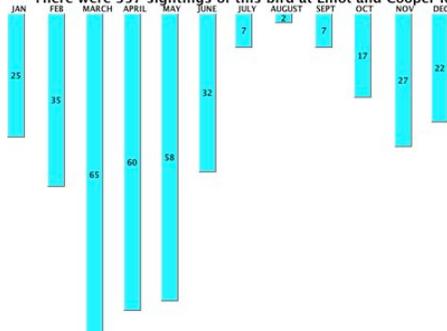
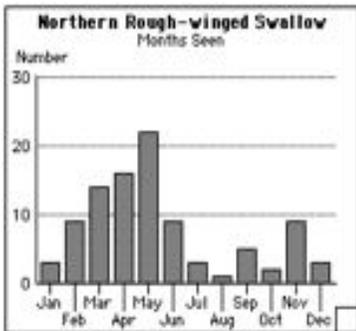
NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW

1995-2003 Database: 96 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 357 Sightings

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

There were 357 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			31	22	20	9	13	2	35	20	8	22	12	24	62	77

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: No shortage of these birds at the site although they seem to dislike July, August, and September.

Other Sites to Try:

This is the most common local swallow, and it can be seen almost anywhere.

Identification: This drab swallow has no very obvious markings and the absence of the same tends to identify the bird. There will be no rusty rump as in the case of the cliff swallow and no white on the rump as in the case of the violet green and tree swallows. Just a small, brownish swallow with a square tail.

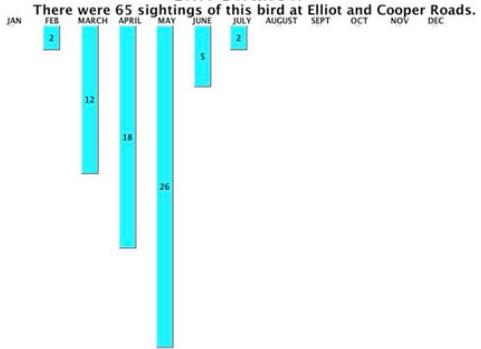
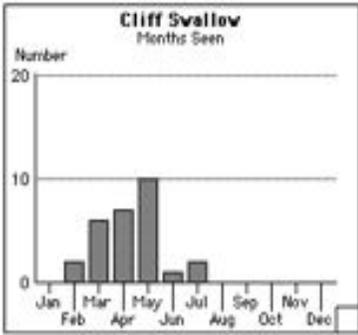
Author's Notes:

These swallows are not adverse to perching. Often I have seen them at Elliot and Cooper Roads in small flocks roosting in the trees along the sidewalk or across the ponds. A solitary one perched will look something like a western wood-pewee at a distance. I found that on some days I would find these birds perching at the site after a long spell in which I saw only flying ones. I have begun to track this perching habit to see if there is any pattern to its occurrence.

CLIFF SWALLOW

1995-2003 Database: 28 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 65 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			5	8	7	1	7		8	9	1	3	1	7		8

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not especially common at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

Can be seen in any of the local sites. Look under culverts and overpasses where the birds make their mud nests. The Student Recreation Center at ASU has an archway where the birds nest. The canal at Baseline and Power Roads has overpasses with large numbers of nests.

Identification: The rusty rump in flight cinches the identification of the cliff swallow. Tail is square. It has a rusty band across the breast and an almost rufous throat.

Author's Notes:

I have often noticed that house sparrows seem to have taken over cliff swallows' mud nests. I look under a culvert and see the swallows' cliff dwelling-like nests, each with a sparrow boldly

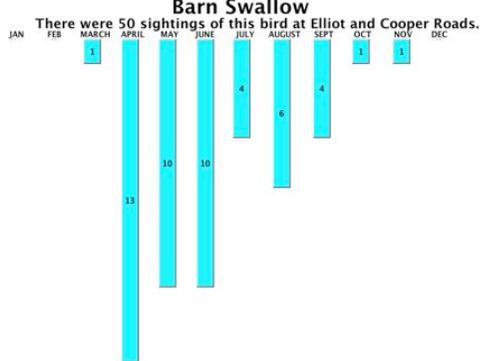
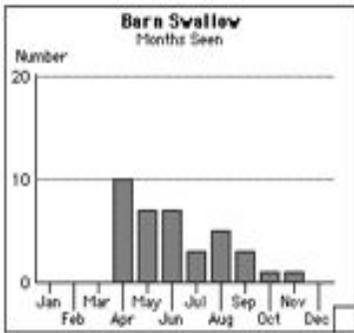
staring out of the openings there completely unharassed. The house sparrow is a tough little bird that can bully the swallows. Once, I saw a sight that made me think the swallows had gotten together for a little community action and seemed to be making a stand and announcing that they *was through takin' it* from sparrows. I took what I saw to be the swallows' equivalent of putting a head on a spike at the castle's west gate: a warning to any and all house sparrows. It's recorded in the database:

Cliff Swallow, 3/19/1998, Baseline and Power, Under the overpass there on the canal. Many mud nests from one of which hung a dead house sparrow dangling from spider's web.

BARN SWALLOW

1995-2003 Database: 37 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 50 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			5	13	7	3	6	3	9	2	1	1				

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: It is only in preparing this data that I have noticed the four-year absence of the bird at the

site. From 2008 to 2009, I saw four at the Water Ranch, and for all places in the database from 2008 to 2010, I have seen 14.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch; Patagonia, Arizona; Flagstaff, Arizona.

Identification: Dark back, lively flight and pointed, deeply forked tail make this swallow easy to identify. Orangish below and dark blue above.

Author's Notes:

Referring to how fast and agile they are, my father used to always say when driving in New England, "No one ever hit a barn swallow!" I always hope to see a barn swallow when I go to Elliot and Cooper Roads, but they are not nearly as common as the northern rough-winged. The following notes attached to sightings of the bird tell more.

***Barn Swallow**, 4/1/1998, Elliot and Cooper Roads, Here's a life lister for Elliot and Cooper Roads. I went to this site after work to try out my brand new super smokin' Swift Audubon 8.5 X 44 binoculars. Oh what a view!!*

***Barn Swallow**, 07/14/2002, Elliot and Cooper Roads, This was a barn swallow on STEROIDS. He was RACING across the field in the blazing summer heat. Occasionally he would shoot up or left or right or down and grab an insect. He'd then POWER his way across the long length of the field.*

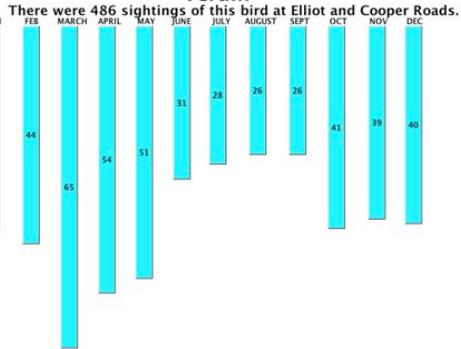
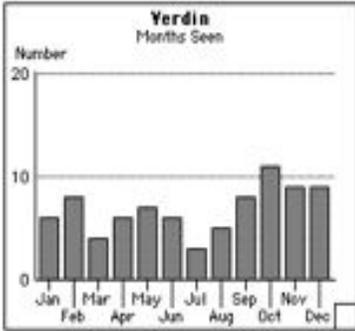
***Barn Swallow**, 07/20/2002, Patagonia, These guys woke me up at 3:30 AM screeching as they flew over the pool at the Stage Stop Inn.*

***Barn Swallow**, 09/21/2002, El Mirage Pond, Several. One got a drink by skimming over the water.*

Barn Swallow, 09/22/2002, Elliot and Cooper Roads, a number of these. One got a drink!

VERDIN

1995-2003 Database: 82 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 486 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		14	31	14	7	14	3	50	33	15	24	20	47	123	90

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Present all months of the year.

Other Sites to Try:

All surrounding neighborhoods and in any desert habitat.

Identification: Tiny and active. Immatures are plain gray while adults have a powdery yellow face and a chestnut patch on the shoulder. Loud, scolding *chik! chik! chik! chik! chik!* Starting in about February or March (ending around June), listen for a fast *twee! twee! twee!* call with descending notes somewhat like the first notes of a canyon wren's call. Builds a ball-shaped nest with a small entrance at the bottom. It is as at home in the suburbs as in the more natural and remote areas of the Sonoran Desert.

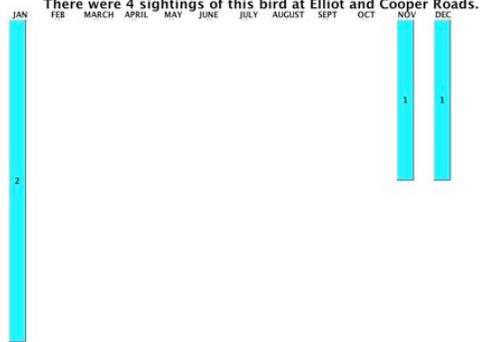
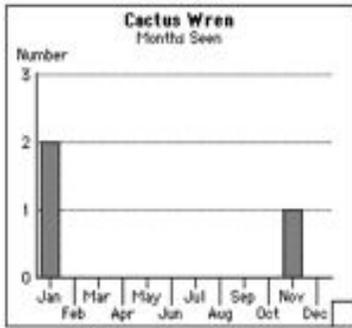
Author's Notes:

The verdin is a great bird to show out-of -towners. Its yellow face, tiny size, and burnt sienna epaulettes make it a plum sighting for people from the east who don't know how common they are here.

CACTUS WREN

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 4 Sightings
Cactus Wren



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1	2											1	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: That this very common bird has been seen only four times in seventeen years and in 1063 visits to Elliot and Cooper Roads is beyond a surprise to say nothing more.

Other Sites to Try:

Almost anywhere with desert.

Identification: Easy to identify by its call which sounds like someone's turning the key in an old volkswagen whose engine doesn't want to start. Volume of the call seems to increase as it is made: *Chi! chi! chi! chi! chi! chi! chi! chi! chi! chi!*
chi! chi! chi! Large white eye line is a good field mark.

Author's Notes:

This common bird of the southwest is Arizona's state bird. It often becomes quite tame; I have seen it hop through the window and into the office at work. Responds quickly to your imitation of its call by answering back with a call of its own. There is one turn as I walk up Pima Canyon at South Mountain Park that I call Cactus Wren Alley as these wrens are so abundant there.

Its general abundance elsewhere makes its rarity at Elliot and Cooper Roads one of the most surprising findings of the database. The "Dry Spell" button (See the discussion of the Inca dove in this book.) shows exactly how rare this bird is. The four sightings are few and usually far between with a staggering record of 836 consecutive visits without a sighting.

Sightings of the Cactus Wren at the Site

***Trip 90**, 11/15/1998, Elliot and Cooper Roads The cactus wren has not been seen for **89** visits*

***Trip 106**, 1/9/1999, Elliot and Cooper Roads The cactus wren has not been seen for **15** visits.*

***Trip 109**, 1/17/1999, Elliot and Cooper Roads The cactus wren has not been seen for **2** visits.*

***Trip 946**, 12/2/2010, Elliot and Cooper Roads The cactus wren has not been seen for **836** visits.*

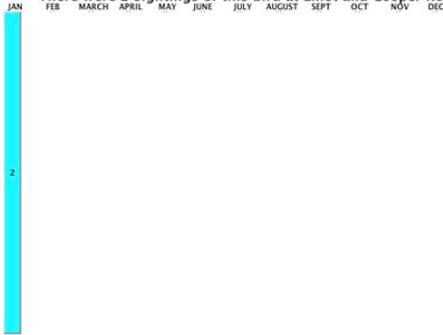
***Last Trips**, Elliot and Cooper Roads The cactus wren hasn't been seen the last **117** visits.*

The "Last Trips" figure is the present count of how many visits the bird has been missing. There were 1063 trips and so adding 946 to 117 gives a sum of 1063.

BEWICK'S WREN

1995-2011 Database: 2 Sightings
Bewick's Wren

There were 2 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
															2	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site. Both sightings were of the bird hiding in an agave.

Other Sites to Try:

My sightings at Boyce Thompson Arboretum outnumber by far any in other sites.

Identification: This brown wren has a prominent white eye stripe as does the marsh wren, but its back is unstreaked and it will be seen in dry areas that the marsh wren eschews.

Author's Notes:

In my journal, I find this entry for Patagonia, Arizona on July 30, 2000. It includes a sighting of the Bewick's wren.

In a clearing overlooking the stream, I spotted a lazuli bunting and everyone rushed over to look. The lazuli bunting is always a welcome sight—or at

least the turquoise male is; the drab female is likely to go unnoticed. There were acorn woodpeckers and Gila woodpeckers, red-shafted flickers, and summer tanagers in the woods. Hopping on the ground was a small bird with a dark spot on its breast. "Song sparrow," I announced.

"It's a Bewick's wren," someone said.

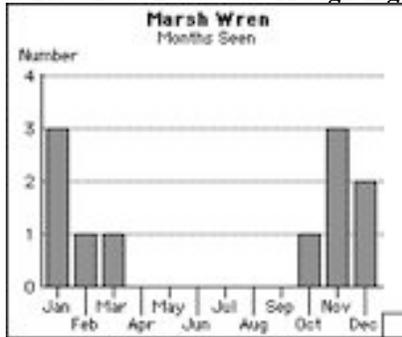
"But it has a spot on its breast," I protested.

"Well, then it's a Bewick's wren with a spot on its breast."

I looked again and had to admit it looked an awful lot like a Bewick's wren. But what was with the spot?

MARSH WREN

1995-2003 Database: 11 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			4	6	1											

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Absent from April through September. Seen only in the reeds in Pond 8 from the main viewing area behind the fire station. When the pond dried up in the summer of 2000, the reeds on the west side of the pond died, and the bird has not been recorded in the database since.

Other Sites to Try:

The only other record in the database is for Boyce Thompson Arboretum on March 2, 1998.

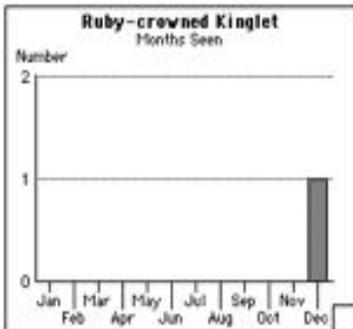
Identification: Listen for its raspy call from within thick stands of cattail or other reeds on any shore. White eye line. Streaked back.

Author's Notes:

The tall reeds just beyond the viewing station overlooking Pond 8 used to be the habitat of this bird. The reeds are long gone and whether they will ever return is somewhat in doubt as water is not being put into the area frequently enough to allow them to grow back.

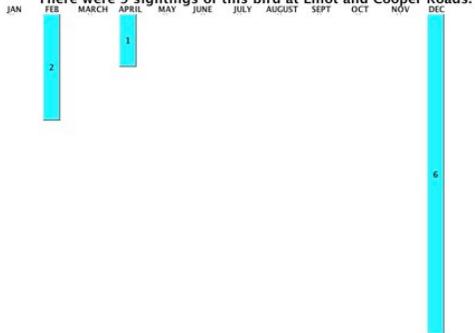
RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



1995-2011 Database: 9 Sightings
Ruby-crowned Kinglet

There were 9 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1						4	1		1			2	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not very common at the site. The 1998 sighting was on December 29.

Other Sites to Try:

There are twenty records for the Boyce Thompson Arboretum, seven for the Water Ranch, five for Pima Canyon in South Mountain Park, and four for the Verde River.

Identification: This tiny olive-colored bird has a white eye ring and light wing bars. The ruby crown is usually hidden. The bill is very small and pointed. It has the habit of hovering in front of leaves or branches. Very active. It is very similar to the Hutton's vireo in physical appearance and behavior as well. Both birds seem to me to have an incomplete eye ring that doesn't connect over the top of the eye. The Hutton's vireo actually has spectacles, but they are hard to make out. The vireo's bill is somewhat thicker, and more importantly, the bird lacks the kinglet's dark band just tailward of the last white wing bar. There is no dark band posterior to the white bar on the Hutton's vireo.

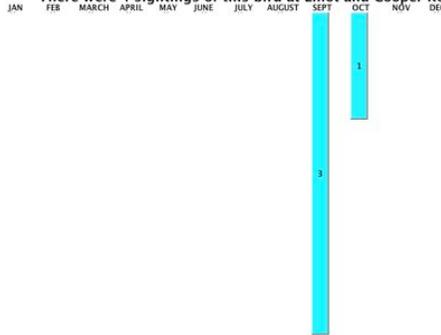
Author's Notes:

On February 7, 1998 I was bird watching with some people and we stopped to get a better look at a ruby-crowned kinglet at Boyce Thompson Arboretum. Someone thought it might be a Hutton's vireo, which they said had spectacles rather than an eye ring and a larger bill than the kinglet. I got a good look at the bird's bill and it was a needle-tipped spike and obviously belonged to a kinglet. I had never seen the Hutton's vireo, so I continued to take an extra hard look at any kinglets I saw until one day I finally was able to add the vireo to my list. Since the sighting of the Hutton's vireo below, I have ceased to consider the spectacle Vs. eye ring field mark but look for the dark bar on the kinglet or the lack of it on the Hutton's. My first sighting of the Hutton's was a mistake because of the spectacles field mark; I had really seen a plumbeous vireo that *really* has spectacles, and I had to change the record.

Hutton's Vireo, 01/07/2006, Gilbert and Riggs Roads, NO BLACK BAR posterior of the most posterior white bar. NONE. Acted very much like the RC kinglet. Broken eye ring. But so has the RC.

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER

1995-2011 Database: 4 Sightings
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
There were 4 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
									1						3	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The three 2010 sightings were all in September and the 2004 sighting in October.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch is a better bet with eight sightings and possibly Pima Canyon although the black-tailed gnatcatcher is far more common there.

Identification: This tiny, active bird differs from the black-tailed gnatcatcher in that it looks like a miniature mockingbird. The underside of its tail, which is often visible, is white with a thin streak of black up the middle. The black-tailed gnatcatcher's tail is mostly black underneath with thin edges of white. The black-tailed gnatcatcher male also has a black cap in spring and summer.

Author's Notes:

I'm not sure why the black-tailed gnatcatcher has never been seen at the site. At Pima Canyon, I have heard its angry scolding on nearly every visit I have made. Both species are intrepid, and you can often walk right up to them and get a good look.

AMERICAN ROBIN

1995-2011 Database: 1 Sighting

American Robin

There was but 1 sighting of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

JAN FEB MARCH APRIL MAY JUNE JULY AUGUST SEPT OCT NOV DEC



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
															1	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: It took fifteen years and 808 trips to see the robin. This shows how rare this well known bird is in the Valley.

Other Sites to Try:

On my 143rd trip to the Water Ranch I saw one. I have four winter sightings at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum, and, by the way, three of the rufous-backed robin from Mexico. I’ve seen the American robin on Mount Ord, on Mount Lemmon, and on the campus of Arizona State University. It is also rather common in Flagstaff.

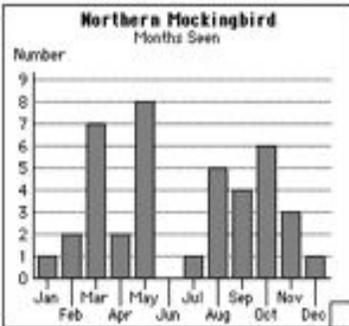
Identification: This large, well known bird is famous for its red breast and habit of walking across yards in search of worms and insects. It has a conspicuous but broken white eye ring. Its bill is yellow, its eggs robin’s egg blue.

Author's Notes:

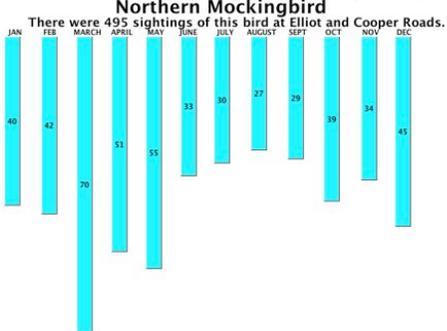
Being a desert rat, I have had few adventures with this bird, but it is a good example of how a very common bird in one place can be a good sighting in another.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 40 Sightings



1995-2011 Database: 495 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		10	14	5	2	6	13	57	41	18	34	15	47	143	89

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The bird is virtually always present but was not recorded on every visit. More accurate recording in later years has resulted in a more realistic graph.

Other Sites to Try:

Very common in suburban neighborhoods and most everywhere else.

Identification: Slender, two or more shades of gray. Flashes of white wing patches in flight.

Author's Notes:

The following notes on the northern mockingbird tell two harrowing stories, one with a happy ending.

Northern Mockingbird, 10/16/2006, Generic Place in Chandler, A grackle chasing him all around the parking lot near Warner and Dobson and he flew in the street to get away and a truck ran over him in a split second. I was mad at the grackle.

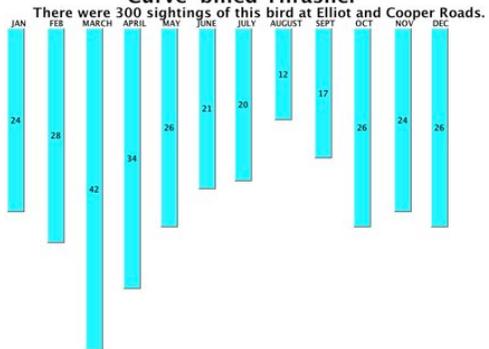
Northern Mockingbird, 02/17/2003, Arizona State University, I rescued this bird. I walked out at Mariposa Hall to the courtyard and saw a bird's tail twitching straight up. I went over and saw that there was a bird stuck in a pvc pipe stuck in the ground. I pulled him out and saw that there was water in the bottom of the pipe and that the mockingbird had tried to get a drink reached down too low and slipped clean into the vertical pipe. He was stuck completely upside down and drowning in the water. He couldn't get out. I held him up and he was coughing and sputtering and freaking out. Who wouldn't? I said "You poor thing!" and pet his head.

Soon he recovered and struggled and I let him go. He flew up on the roof. He was obviously in great shape and would survive this scary ordeal.

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER

1995-2003 Database: 10 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 300 Sightings
Curve-billed Thrasher



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
					3	1	4	4	6	2	8	14	10	44	121	83

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: This bird used to be very surprisingly uncommon at Elliot and Cooper Roads. It was first recorded on October 8, 2000 at Elliot and Cooper Roads, the 240th trip—and it was a 'heard only' record. Now it has become one of the most common birds at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

Present in most Valley neighborhoods. Very common in desert areas such as Pima Canyon in South Mountain Park.

Identification: The two-note "Hey, you!" whistle is easily remembered and the bird is often identified by its call alone. Long, curved bill, long tail, and orange eye. Roots around on the ground like a towhee, but also will perch high on a post or on a saguaro in the desert.

Author's Notes:

The following database notes tell quite a bit about the curve-billed thrasher:

Curve-billed Thrasher, 1/8/1998, Pima Canyon, Really working on the ground with chunks of peat moss-looking junk. Orange eye. Also on a saguaro. Steve and I.

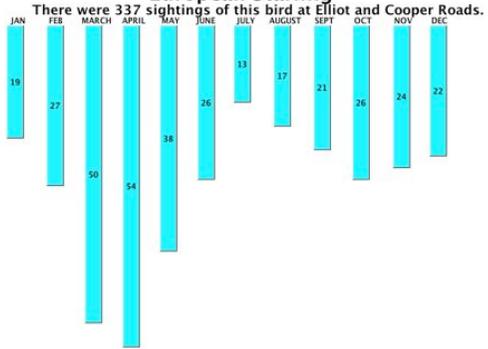
Curve-billed Thrasher, 1/11/1998, Pima Canyon, Thrashing towhee-like in twigs on the ground. Another seen doing the same. Another atop a saguaro.

Curve-billed Thrasher, 4/26/1998, Pima Canyon, I also put in Bendire's thrasher because one of the CB thrashers was hanging out with a straight-billed lemon-eyed thrasher. I read later that the immature CB thrasher shares these characteristics with the Bendire's so out he goes! Sonny and Steve and I went . We walked clear up to Fat Man's pass and we walked there for about five hours. Came back on the Mormon Trail. It started raining and thundering and the rain was quite cold. It stopped and we were warm again.

EUROPEAN STARLING

1995-2003 Database: 49 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 337 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		10	14	16	4	4	1	31	24	11	24	9	37	86	65

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Extremely common and seen in all seasons.

Other Sites to Try:

This bird occurs almost everywhere.

Identification: The starling's short tail gives it a stubby profile that makes it easy to identify at roost or in flight even at a distance. No other black bird has such a short tail. It has a delta-winged look in flight. In breeding plumage, the bird has a very yellow beak and shows purple iridescence and yellowish spots.

Author's Notes:

Many years ago, certainly before my first official bird trip, I heard the characteristic *killdeer! killdeer!* of the killdeer—but when I looked up I saw a starling on a power wire. The starling is an excellent mimic.

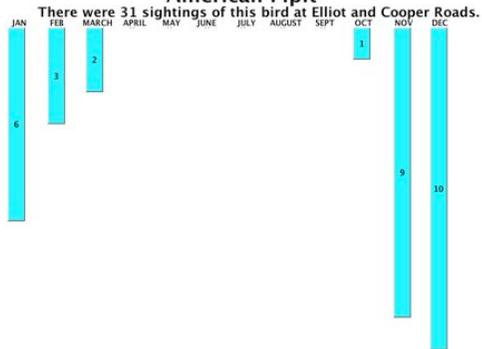
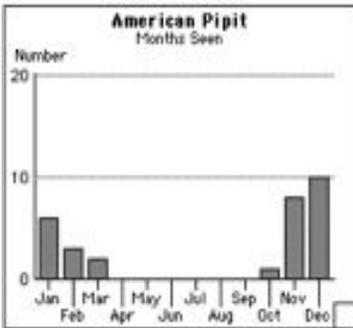
For several years in a row in the early seventies, a migrating starling arrived at the family home. He had white tail feathers as if he had been bombarded by gamma rays. When we spotted him, we would always say, "White-Tail's back!"

People dislike the starling because it is an introduced species, but I have always been rather fond of it. I would see the birds in the wet grass of local neighborhoods and enjoy watching them sport in the irrigated lawns. In summer plumage, the bird is really quite beautiful with its speckles and yellow beak and iridescent purple feathers. It's so pretty you quickly forget the negative vibes that you're supposed to have for it.

AMERICAN PIPIT

1995-2003 Database: 30 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 31 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		1	16	10			2	2								

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Has a clear migration pattern. The only sighting in the new database was in November of 2003. Since then the bird has been absent. This may be because there is less water at the site today.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch and Higley and Ocotillo Roads are good places.

Identification: Imagine a rather good-sized sparrow on the ground with a more slender beak and the tail bobbing motion something akin to the teeter tottering of some shore bird like the spotted sandpiper. Has white outer tail feathers much like those of the vesper sparrow.

Author's Notes:

I saw my first water pipit (American pipit) on October 23, 1971 at what I called the Phoenix Sewer Flats. It was on a fence, a fact that is peculiar because the bird almost never perches like that; it prefers to stay on the ground. This is a fun bird to keep track of because you could easily miss it in a year. That almost happened in the year 2001. I saw it for the first time late in the year on December 24th and again on the 30th at the once vacant lot on McQueen and Elliot Roads. Regarding the December 24th sighting I wrote in my journal:

At the end of the road is Mesquite High School. It borders the southern end of the lot. I looked and saw that there were water pipits in the grass on the baseball diamond. They flew out into the plowed field of the lot. Pipits look like large heavily streaked sparrows, but they give themselves away with a teeter totter pumping of their tails and a longer, non-conical beak. So far this year, they are the only water pipits I have found anywhere, so I was happy to see them.

Database notes for Elliot and Cooper Roads read:

American Pipit, 2/21/1998, Elliot and Cooper Roads, A large flock came in and landed in the field near the parking lot behind the fire station. They looked a bit like horned larks at first.

PHAINOPEPLA

1995-2003 Database: 2 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
							2									

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The two sightings of the bird were a week apart and both at the east end of the site in the trees on Pond 2.

Other Sites to Try:

Boyce Thompson Arboretum is the best place. The Verde River and the Superstition Mountains are excellent sites as well. Also seen at Gilbert and Riggs Roads and Pima Canyon.

Identification: Male unmistakable with its lacquer black feathers, crest, and white wing patches that appear in flight. Note the ruby red eye. Female is overall gray. Read Author's Notes for more identification information.

Author's Notes:

A favorite entry of mine for the Phainopepla is the following:

*Phainopepla, 11/16/1974, Organ Pipe National Monument,
At Organ Pipe a big bull kangaroo rat jumped on us while
we slept. Phainopeplas and loggerhead shrike.*

The phainopepla is not everywhere as rare as it is at Elliot and Cooper Roads. I go to my journal, find an essay on Patagonia Arizona on July 30, 2000, and read:

There was a trail through the meadow leading into the cottonwoods, and our group slowly moved down it. Phainopeplas were everywhere and we talked about how even the most spectacular of birds becomes a "trash bird" if there are too many of them around. Such was the case with phainopeplas on this trip. You'd see movement in the trees and raise your binoculars to your eyes only to lower them with a disappointed frown and say, "Just a phainopepla." But the phainopepla is one of the most beautiful birds of all. For those who may be unfamiliar with them, imagine a lean cardinal dipped in the blackest of paint from crest to tail. Give him a narrow bill and two blood-red rubies for eyes. Then add a startling patch of white on each wing that appears only in flight, and you'll have an idea of what the bird looks like. More than once a person has seen my binoculars and come up excitedly to say, "We just saw this bird that looked like a black cardinal!"

"Phainopepla," I answered immediately.

Phainopeplas are silky flycatchers of the arid Southwest. At certain times of year they feed upon poisonous mistletoe berries. During these times, their stomachs shrink to the size of the berries and they process them one after another by swallowing them and squeezing the pulp and seeds out of their

bellies and into the intestines and, rather quickly then, into the outside world again. Mistletoe berries don't have much nutritional value, so the birds have to eat an awful lot of them.

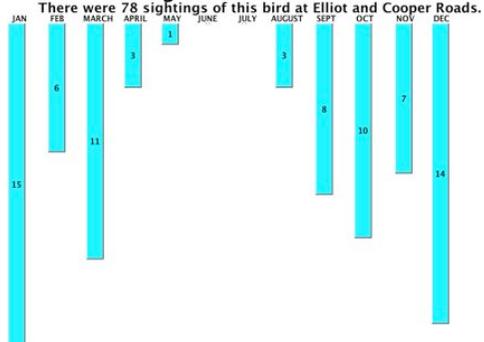
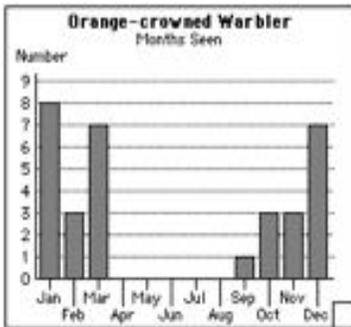
My notes from a biology class tell of a curious drama that plays out when the remains of the berries pass through the bird. Mistletoe berries are very sticky. (In fact, people used to use them to make birdlime.) When the seeds that fall from the phainopepla adhere to the limbs of a mesquite tree, the tree starts a process of self defense by excreting a kind of sap under the seed that raises it above the bark. The seed then begins its attack by sending out a root-like shoot downward toward the surface of the limb. The tree raises the seed and the seed counterattacks by lengthening the shoot and the race is on. If it rains before the shoot reaches the bark, the seed is washed away and the tree wins. If not, the seed will root itself there, and a parasitic clump of mistletoe will grow on the limb of the tree.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER

1995-2003 Database: 32 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 78 Sightings

Orange-crowned Warbler



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			5	9	9	2	6	2	20	8	1	4		2	4	6

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Only the Yellow-rumped Warbler is more common at the site than the Orange-crowned. Uncommon or missing from April through August. Most often seen in the low bushes behind the fire station or along the canal road. The site is the best area in the database to see this bird.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch

Identification: Often disappears into foliage making observation a challenge. No other bird at the site is as uniformly pastel green. Look for very light grayish green streaks on the breast. Suggestion of a yellowish eye ring but few other markings. The orange crown is usually hidden.

Author's Notes:

This is a good bird, but I am often a little disappointed to see that it is only an orange-crowned instead of some new warbler that I could add to my list for the site. The first sighting on November 6, 1998 was different, of course, and I kept asking the other bird watchers who happened to be there if they agreed that I was right about its being an orange-crowned warbler. One of them said in a rather bored voice, "Yeah, yeah, that's him."

Once at the Water Ranch someone said they had seen an orange-crowned warbler disappear in a bush. Another birder said, "Well, the orange-crowned pishes out pretty well." He then said, "Pish! Pish! Pish!" and the orange-crowned warbler hopped out of concealment to see what was going on.

NASHVILLE WARBLER

1995-2011 Database: 1 Sighting
Nashville Warbler

There was but 1 sighting of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

JAN FEB MARCH APRIL MAY JUNE JULY AUGUST SEPT OCT NOV DEC

1

Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
															1	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Only seen once.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch

Identification: The gray head and yellow body make this look a lot like the Macgillivray's warbler, but the Nashville has a perfect and complete eye ring while the Macgillivray's is broken front and back. The Nashville's throat is yellow and a reddish crown may be seen. The under-tail coverts are yellow and at a distance one may even mistake it for a yellow-rumped warbler.

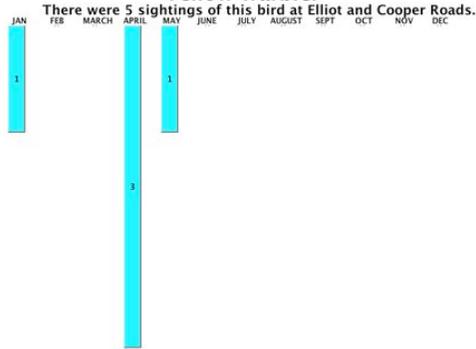
Author's Notes:

I have sighted the bird nine times and three times noted the conspicuousness of the eye ring.

YELLOW WARBLER

1995-2011 Database: 5 Sightings

Yellow Warbler



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
										1		1		1		2

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not common at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

The Boyce Thompson Arboretum is best followed by the Water Ranch.

Identification: This warbler is mostly yellow except for some darker feathers on wing and tail and the red streaks on its breast (not so evident on the female's). Its call, "*Sweet-sweet-sweet! I' m so sweet!*" is quite loud.

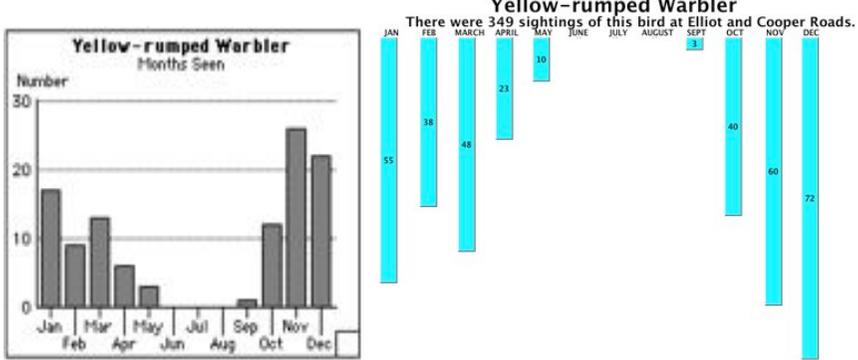
Author's Notes:

I have only seen this bird 44 times, a fact that doesn't really surprise me; they have always seemed scarce to me.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER

1995-2003 Database: 109 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 349 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1	1	21	31	29	10	15	10	36	20	9	18	11	28	66	43

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: By far the most common warbler at Elliot and Cooper Roads. Gone entirely June, July, and August.

Other Sites to Try:

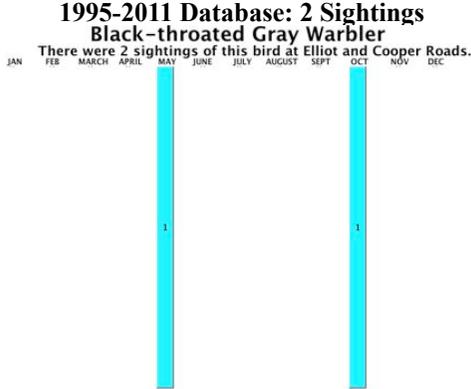
Yellow-rumps may occur at any of the other sites mentioned in this book. This is a common backyard warbler seen in any of the mature neighborhoods of the Phoenix area.

Identification: Yellow rump is diagnostic. White patches on the tail and wings. Immatures rather heavily streaked. The prevalent Audubon's race has a yellow throat and larger patch of white on the wing. This bird will hover in front of foliage and then alight. Very active. Audubon's race is by far the most common, but the Myrtle race with a white throat and fewer white feathers on the wing has been reported at the site. Immatures of either race can be confusing, so one can best determine the race by looking at finely marked adults. Listen for a *snick! snick!* sound from this bird.

Author's Notes:

I have never seen the Myrtle race at Elliot and Cooper Roads and but once elsewhere. I am not surprised that it used to be listed as a separate species; on April 13, 2007, I found myself trying to identify a very beautifully marked warbler in the mesquite trees on the shore of Canyon Lake. It turned, revealing the diagnostic yellow rump, and I realized that I had a new life lister—for my list of races anyway. The Myrtle race looked very much different from the yellow-rumped. Perhaps it was the white throat in combination with the full adult plumage that made this bird look at first so unfamiliar.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
									1						1	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, and Mount Ord

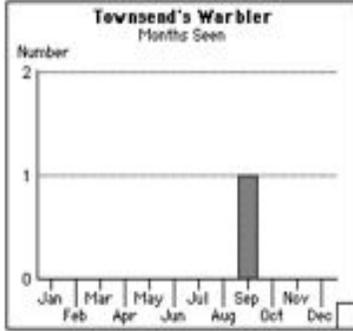
Identification: This warbler has a black and white look with black streaks on its white sides. A black cheek patch is bordered by white above and below. The bird’s crown is black. Look for a small yellow spot in front of its eye near the beak.

Author's Notes:

Save for the small spot near the eye, this warbler has no yellow at all, a fact that gives it a different appearance from many of the warblers present at the site. Its black and white coloration have made me look twice to make sure it wasn’t the rarer black-and-white warbler.

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
							1									

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

I've seen it three times at Pima Canyon.

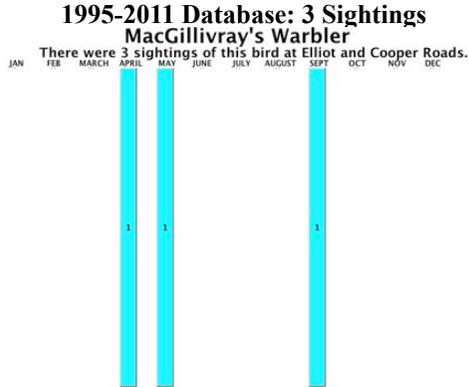
Identification: The black cheek patch surrounded by yellow above and below the eye gives the bird a distinctive facial pattern and is a key identification feature. The male has a black throat.

Author's Notes:

Just a note from the database:

Townsend's Warbler, 05/13/2007, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, I said I thought I saw one and then it came out and this guy said "There's your Townsend's."

MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
										1					1	1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

This bird has been seen more often at Pima Canyon and the Water Ranch in far fewer visits.

Identification: The gray head and face along with the broken white eye ring are the best field marks for this bird. It is yellow below.

Author's Notes:

I don't see this bird very often; I have only 15 sightings in all, but it seems just the same a familiar bird to me. I have records for it in 1971 and 1972 and I remember it from my days in college in Flagstaff—but I am wrong there; as there is no record in the database.

It is funny how memory works. I took a memoir writing course and learned that your memory is your reality be it accurate or not.

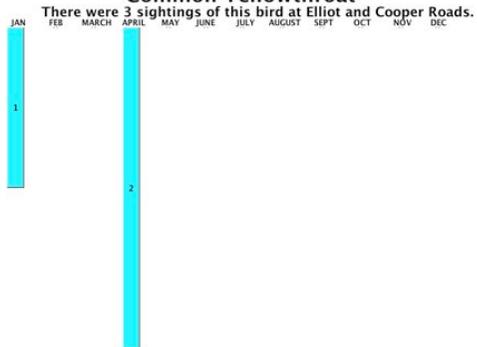
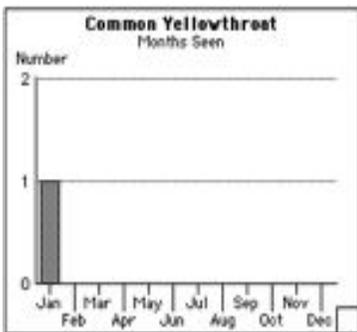
It's often all you have to go by. It's correct to write from it but never to lie. But your reality can be almost a fantasy at times. I remember the day that I went to get Paul McCartney tickets. I waited in a line with several thousand people in a parking lot of a nearby community college. For years afterwards, I had an image in my mind of a small man carrying a large glass pickle jar filled with tickets. He walked along the lines reaching into the jar and one by one slowly handing out tickets. I often commented on what a ridiculous system it was. For one thing, the pickle jar was heavy and if dropped could break and cause a riot of people to jump on the tickets as children jump to get candy that spills from a *piñata*.

One day, I looked at my journal notes in my computer. I had written about the way the tickets had been handed out. There was no pickle jar. Nothing of the kind. My reality was nothing more than a trick of my memory and imagination.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting

1995-2011 Database: 3 Sightings



There were 3 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				1							1					1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Uncommon at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch (near reeds along the ponds) and Boyce Thompson Arboretum (at Ayer Lake) are good places to look.

Identification: The heavy black mask of the male bordered by a white band above and the bright yellow throat below is hard to miss, but the female is much more nondescript. People say its call is *Wich-i-ty! Wich-i-ty! Wich-i-ty!* But I don't hear the *ch*. To me it's closer to *Wizardry! Wizardry! Wizardry!* In fact, I have often written in my notebook that I heard just *Wizard! Wizard! Wizard!*

Author's Notes:

The bird seems to love reeds and cattails. Such areas strike me as rather sterile and poor places for food the way mangrove swamps seem to me, but the yellowthroat apparently knows better.

I have in my home several notebooks written by my father when he was a child. They have titles like “Westward Ho!” and “Thrilling Diary—This book is full of weird experiences, thrilling adventures, distant travels, and bird lore.” They are written long-hand and are well spelled and detailed reports of school in New England and travels west. At ten years old, he was recording one bird sighting after another. The notebooks are also full of surprisingly good line drawings.

The “Westward Ho!” notebook refers to a Maryland yellowthroat which I learn is the common yellowthroat seen at Elliot and Cooper Roads. The journal reminds me of Tom Sawyer, whose precocity is part of what makes Twain's book funny. Tom isn't used to seeing ticks so early in the season, and says, “This is a pretty early tick, I reckon. It's the first one I've seen this year.” My father has been on a trip and stops to visit one Uncle Bill at Lincoln University in Philadelphia and writes at twelve years old:

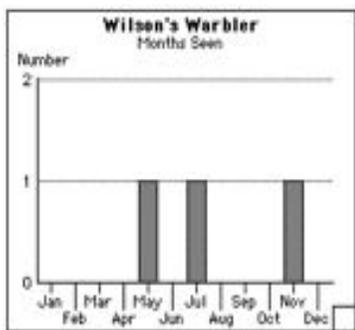
Sept 21, 1930

Still at Lincoln. This morning in an old pasture I saw a surprising number of birds for the season. They are as follows:

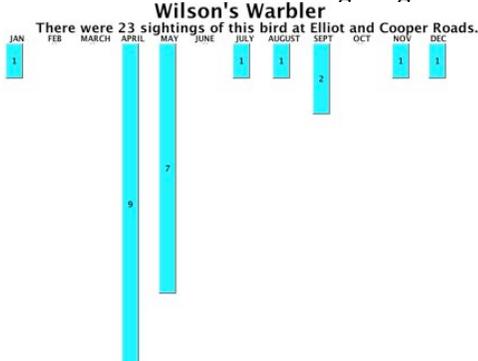
- Immature Red-headed Woodpecker
- A lot of Cedar Waxwings
- Some Crows
- Some Blue Jays
- A flock of Flickers
- A Maryland Yellowthroat
- A pair of Towhees
- And a Brown Thrasher
- Also, two little birds unidentified and Starlings.

WILSON'S WARBLER

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings



1995-2011 Database: 23 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1	2					2	1	3	5			2	7

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: April and May figures would seem to have significance.

Other Sites to Try:

Lots of sightings at the Water Ranch, Pima Canyon, and the Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Identification: The yellow male has a black cap and the female is very yellow below. Wings, back, and tail of both are darker and more greenish.

Author's Notes:

Looking into the database for the Wilson's warbler reminds me of a birding site with wet green fields next to a patch of desert with a mesquite tree that I used to call the Warbler Tree. I would enter my records there under the heading of Gilbert and Riggs Roads even though it was a bit north of that. In the Warbler Tree, I have seen as many as four different warblers at a time. Once, I drove by and saw some people there. I thought at first they were bird watchers, but then saw that they were dove hunters. Later, I returned to find the hunters' usual litter of 12-gauge shotgun shell casings and empty ammo boxes lying everywhere.

The warbler tree is gone now and the little fields and patch of desert next to it are covered with new housing. At least the database records how the area used to be:

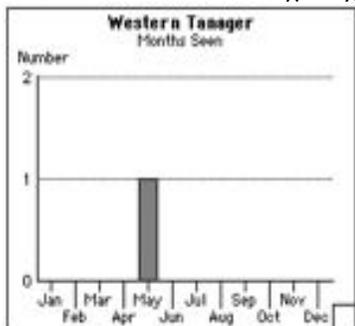
Wilson's Warbler, 04/24/1999, Gilbert and Riggs Roads, The Parks and Recreation bird group was there and I accompanied them to Gilbert and Riggs.

Warbling Vireo, 04/24/1999, Gilbert and Riggs Roads, The Parks and Recreation bird group was there and I accompanied them to Gilbert and Riggs. Actually this is that place a mile or less north of Gilbert and Riggs. These birds were cool because they exhibited the warbling vireo trademarks: several in a tree and forever hidden behind any

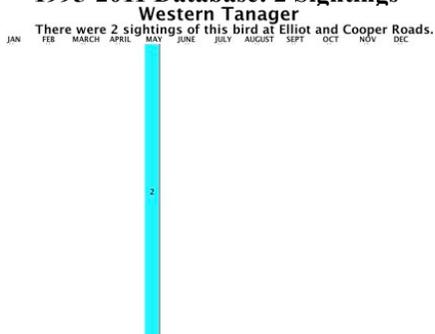
*available twig—no distinguishing characteristics—
featureless until you see a light eye stripe.*

WESTERN TANAGER

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



1995-2011 Database: 2 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
							1		1							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Sightings in May two years apart.

Other Sites to Try:

Greatest number of sightings are at Boyce Thompson Arboretum and, of all places, Peace Park in Tempe. Also seen at the Water Ranch and Usery Mountain Park.

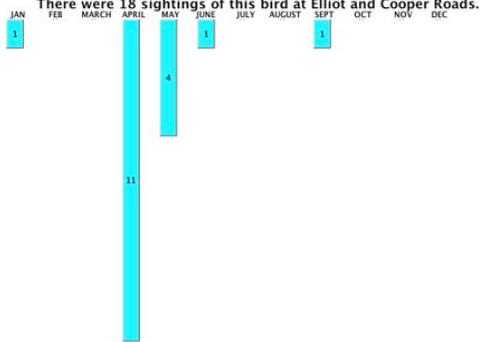
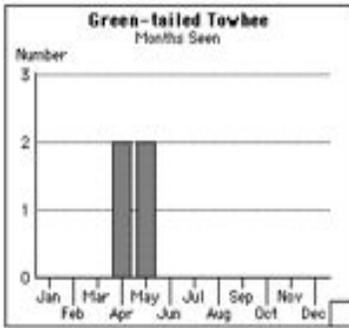
Identification: Look for the male's red face and head, yellow body and black wings and tail. Females lack the red, but can be told by the white wing bars and the rather large, pale beak.

Author's Notes:

The male's clear, colorful markings make it easy to identify from a distance. This has often been true when one has perched on the wire fence some distance from our deck in the Flagstaff woods.

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE

1995-2003 Database: 4 Sightings **1995-2011 Database: 18 Sightings**
Green-tailed Towhee



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				3	1						1	3			3	7

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

This species is not common at the site. Seen only behind the fire station along the walkway to the observation area.

Other Sites to Try:

Pima Canyon in South Mountain Park is an excellent place to see this bird. The database also has records for the Water Ranch and the Superstition Mountains. April and May are best in all sites.

Identification: A better name for this bird would be the rufous-crowned towhee as this is perhaps the best field mark. Quite greenish in the tail and on the back. White chin. Acts much like the Abert's towhee, but is a smaller bird.

Author's Notes:

I have one memory of a dead green-tailed towhee at ASU that I have no date to record in the database. Another record of a dead one at the same site reads:

Green-tailed Towhee, 06/04/2002, Arizona State University, He was lying dead on the ledge out the window of the Memorial Union. He lay by two silver wires that seemed to me to be electric and that were there to shock the pigeons away. I think this bird was killed by the shock.

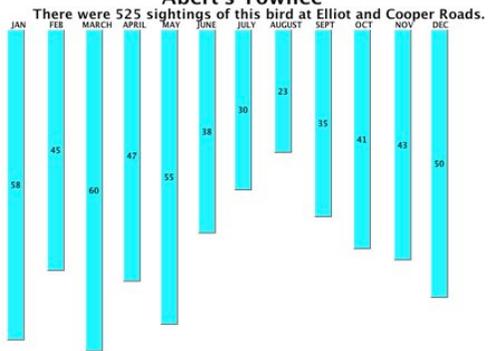
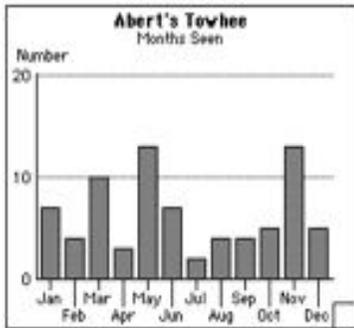
I am not a believer in the supernatural or in mysticism of any kind, but like many I enjoy a good ghost story or a strange coincidence. Therefore, I don't mind saying that this record gives me an eerie feeling.

Green-tailed Towhee, 04/21/2007, North Villas Lane, This is the anniversary of Noodles' passing and an unusual bird has come to walk around her grave. This is the first Green-tailed Towhee ever recorded here.

ABERT'S TOWHEE

1995-2003 Database: 77 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 525 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			19	22	12	6	17	13	58	42	20	28	16	47	137	88

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Extremely common at the site. Only the mourning dove has more records.

Other Sites to Try:

Any of the desert areas mentioned in this book. The walkway up to the viewing station behind the fire station is one of the best places anywhere to see this bird. Look for the Abert's towhee at Pima Canyon as well along with his cousin, the canyon towhee.

Identification: Black around the bill looks like a mask. A tan ground-loving bird with a dark tail and rufous under-tail coverts. Similar to the curve-billed thrasher, but smaller with a shorter tail and a conical beak. Kicks backwards on the ground with both feet to uncover seeds and insects.

Author's Notes:

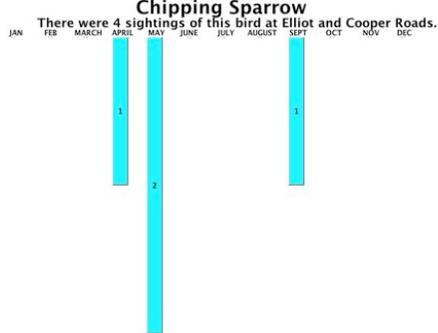
This is one of the birds that people from the eastern US will ask to see. The bird's entire range is in a limited area in the arid southwest.

CHIPPING SPARROW

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



1995-2011 Database: 4 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
				1					1				1	1		

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Very uncommon at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

Other Sites to Try:

Most records are in Flagstaff or at the Water Ranch.

Identification: A small, stubby, ground-loving sparrow with a conspicuous rufous crown, an unstreaked, light breast, and a long white eye line.

Author's Notes:

The chipping sparrow brings to mind many happy memories of summers on the shore of Lake Itasca in Minnesota. These little birds were a common sight on the ground there.

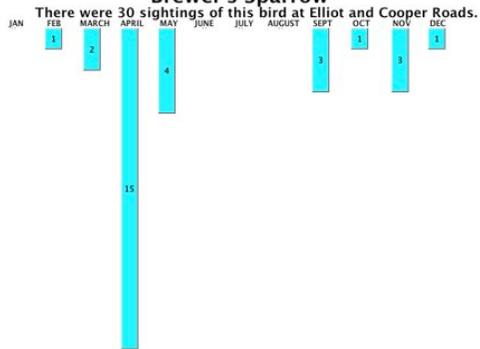
As I look in the database, a recent sighting brings back a less happy memory of what happened when I was driving a rented PT Cruiser in Wisconsin.

Chipping Sparrow, 8/15/2009, Wisconsin Rapids, Oh the poor little chipping sparrow. He flew up and hit my antenna and was killed.

BREWER'S SPARROW

1995-2003 Database: 8 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 30 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			2	2			4		2	5	1	6			1	7

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not too uncommon at the site. The 15 sightings in April seem significant.

Other Sites to Try:

Most often seen in Pima Canyon and at the Water Ranch.

Identification: The clear, unstreaked breast and generally washed out appearance of this small sparrow makes it fairly easy to identify. Has the suggestion of an eye ring and a slightly streaked crown. The bird has been described as having a “blank look.”

Author's Notes:

I have seen them in fairly large flocks in the desert. One of the birds on my first official bird list in 1971, it has a note attached to the record that seems to have been written after the sighting:

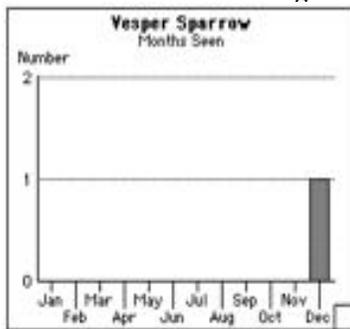
Brewer's Sparrow, 4/17/1971, Headlight Pond, I remember this being a very nondescript thing.

The note on the following record gives identification information:

Brewer's Sparrow, 09/11/2004, Pima Canyon, Lacked the blank look. It had fine streaking on the head. Notched tail. White eye-ring. Small. Must be a Brewer's sparrow.

VESPER SPARROW

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1													

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

Two sightings at McQueen and Elliot Roads a mile from the site and one at both at the Water Ranch and the Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Identification: The white outer tail feathers of this brownish sparrow is a key identification feature. The notched tail lacks the white tip of the lark sparrow's.

Author's Notes:

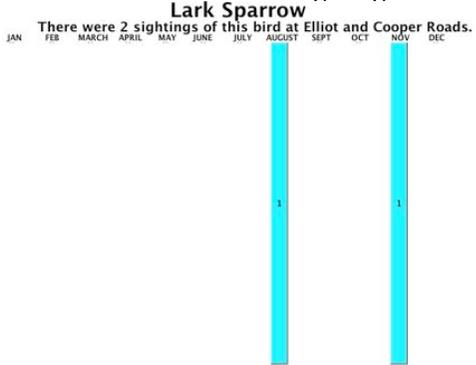
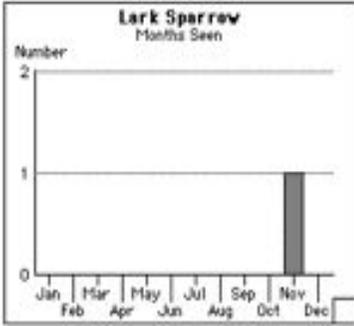
In 1998 there was a large field to the south of the ponds at Elliot and Cooper Roads which today is a residential area. The Vesper sparrow was surely seen in this field. That's my memory of it as well, and the sighting of a meadowlark on the same day makes it more than likely that I was in the field as well as at the ponds.

There was no note attached to this bird or any of the others listed on this day, and the journal field is empty as well. However, the list of 27 birds seen on that day is surprisingly rich with good sightings in addition to the Vesper sparrow. They include the American pipit, the cattle egret, the common snipe, the loggerhead shrike, the marsh wren, the western meadowlark, the greater roadrunner, the vermilion flycatcher, and others.

LARK SPARROW

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting

1995-2011 Database: 2 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1						1							

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

The Water Ranch, the Superstition Mountains, Higley and Ocotillo Roads.

Identification: The striking facial pattern streaked in rufous, black, and white, the black spot on the clear breast, the rounded, white-tipped tail, and white outer feathers are all features that are quite conspicuous.

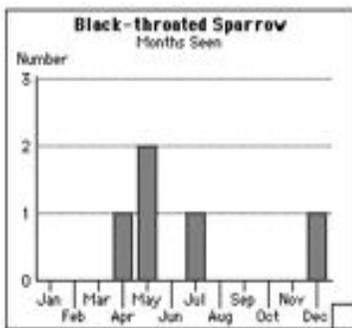
Author's Notes:

One sighting of the lark sparrow was on a trip where we really had some difficulty in the desert heat without enough water. The database journal notes read:

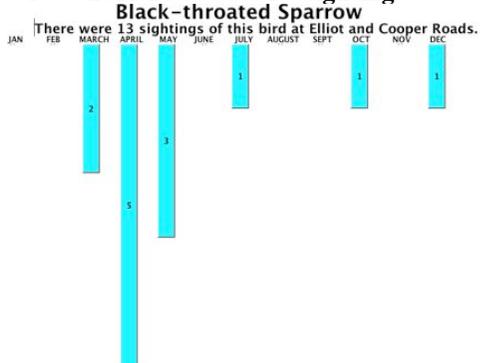
Superstitions 09/14/2003 This was the time we hiked ten hours thinking it would be a shorter hike. We didn't bring enough water. Went to the cliff dwellings. Steve, Ditsworth, and I went. We climbed 3000 feet. We got a half gallon of water out of a tiny puddle. It kept refilling. There was a wonderful wind mill with shiny silver blades. It dribbled its water into a trough, behind which was a stand of green lily-like reeds. There were wasps in the trough of clear water. It was a long drive down dirt roads to the trailhead. On the way out, we saw a truck kind of in our way on the dirt road. We were looking at a big Cooper's hawk and we asked what the guys in the truck were looking at. They said there was a deer over there. Then I noticed one of them had a bow. I hope the deer got away. I had an O'Doul's near beer on the drive back. It was delicious. Ditsworth and the rest of us now refer to this as the Death March.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW

1995-2003 Database: 5 Sightings



1995-2011 Database: 13 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		1	2	1					1		1		1		5

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The 1996 sighting was of a dead bird on the canal road.

Other Sites to Try:

Pima Canyon in South Mountain Park is the best site in the database for this bird, but there are lots of sightings at Usury Mountain Park and the Superstition Mountains. Recorded also at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum, the Verde River, Mount Ord, and Canyon Lake.

Identification: The black bib and bold black and white striped face are hard to miss.

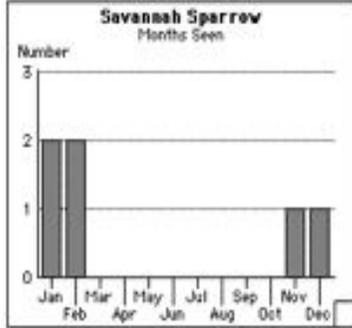
Author's Notes:

Any birder from the East would jump at the chance to see this desert bird—and not necessarily only to add him to their list as a trophy but because it is an especially attractive species. Its throat, as advertised, is black, but its face is too, and there are two bright stripes of white—one above the eye and one below like some kind of wicked sparrow's war paint.

More birders are fanatical about warblers than about sparrows, but sparrows are a very good group to study. Their migrations aren't usually quite as dramatic and fascinating, and they aren't usually the multi-colored songsters that warblers are, but then again there are quite a lot of them—about thirty in a pinch, and when you add their brethren, the towhees and finches and longspurs and grosbeaks into the mix, you've got even more of them than warblers.

SAVANNAH SPARROW

1995-2003 Database: 6 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		2	2	2												

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not seen for many years likely because of the loss of the field on the south side of the site. The November to February pattern seems to be significant.

Other Sites to Try:

A new good site for this bird is Higley and Ocotillo Roads, where the bird has been seen on five of the 22 trips in November, December, January, and March.

Identification: The heavily streaked breast of the birds sighted here also had the black central spot which is known to occur in the west. Yellow lores were also seen. Spook it, and it will fly a short distance and alight again.

Author's Notes:

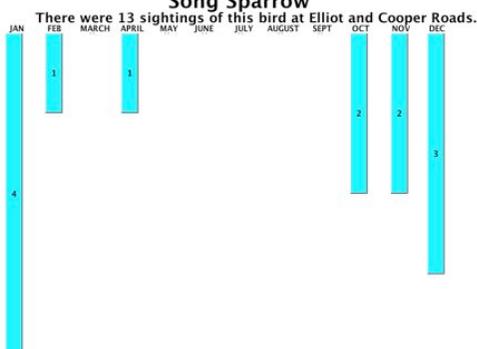
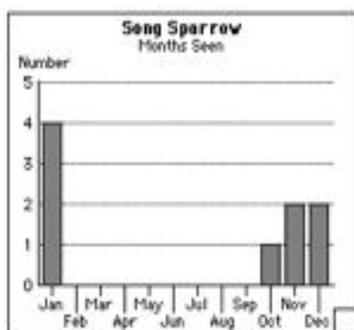
Notes at the Higley site echo the identification information above:

Savannah Sparrow, 12/06/2008, Higley and Ocotillo Roads, These in little flocks that would fly for a short distance and alight in a tree or on the ground. Western variety with spot on the breast.

SONG SPARROW

1995-2003 Database: 9 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 13 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			6	2	1							1			1	2

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

Missing in the summer months.

Other Sites to Try:

With 57 sightings of the bird in 173 trips, the Water Ranch is hard to beat as a place to see this bird. The picnic/camping area near the southwest side of Pond 1 at the Water Ranch often seems to have a song sparrow. There are many records for the song sparrow at Boyce Thompson Arboretum as well.

Identification: Look for a conspicuous black breast spot on this boldly streaked brown bird. The brown is of a milk chocolate variety. Will perch rather high, but it often is seen low in the brush bordering a pond or on the ground at the water’s edge. The call is often the best way to identify the bird. Listen for three distinct chirps followed by a trill. (See Author’s Notes for more.)

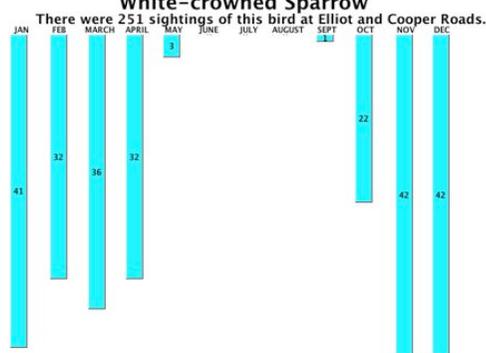
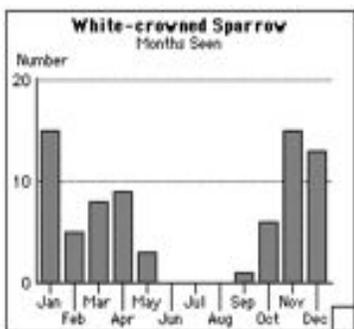
Author's Notes:

On one trip to the Water Ranch, I stood near a song sparrow who repeatedly called. I wrote the song down as best I could in my usual 6 X 4 notebook: “*Snink! Snink! Snink! eeeeeeeeeeeeeee!*” The trill that follows the three “sninks” seemed to vary and was often quite complicated, so I decided that when I got home I would type it like this: *Snink! Snink! Snink! #@&^#%*\#&>!!!*

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW

1995-2003 Database: 75 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 251 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		2	15	24	25	6	2	5	23	18	9	18	7	20	40	37

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Leaves in the summer.

Other Sites to Try:

Any desert or wild areas. Pima Canyon, the Superstition Mountains, and other sites are good.

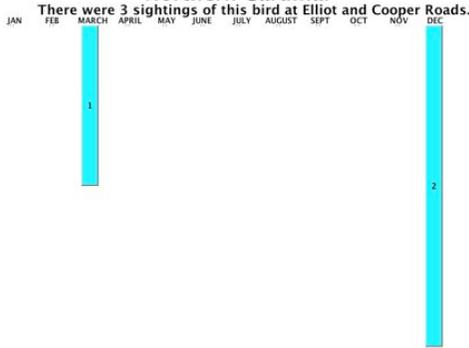
Identification: Light pinkish bill is a tip-off on this bird. The two white stripes on the crown are tilted upward. Think the immature might be a rufous-crowned sparrow? Don't even go there. It isn't. Look at the beak. It's rather pinkish or beige. The call is rather distinctive. If you have been at Elliot and Cooper Roads and heard the normal calls for the months when the white-crowned is absent, you will find it hard to miss this sudden, rather complicated call coming from the trees—and perhaps the long wait has caused you to forget the call.

Author's Notes:

The white-crowned sparrow is gone for a number of months. You may not expect to see it from May until late October, so you have time to grow to miss it and welcome its return until soon enough you tire of too many sightings. I have many memories of this bird because it stands out so plainly with its white head markings. I also know its cousin, the white-throated sparrow, which also has a white crown of sorts and yellow lores. It likes wooded areas and stays away from dry, scraggly areas where the white-crowned sparrow is at home.

NORTHERN CARDINAL

1995-2011 Database: 3 Sightings
Northern Cardinal



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
											2	1				

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try: The Boyce Thompson Arboretum and the Superstition Mountains are the best places.

Identification: This crested red bird can only be confused with the Pyrrhuloxia, which is quite uncommon in the valley but often seen around Tucson. Look for the black mask of the adult and the faded red of the female. Known for its *Teacher! Teacher! Teacher!* call, but also often does an imitation of a Buck Rogers ray gun: *Twoi! twoi! twoi! twoi!*

Author's Notes:

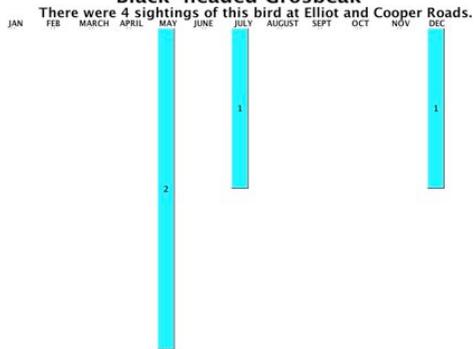
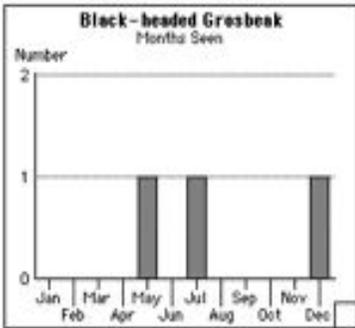
Arizonans often believe that the cardinal is an eastern bird not present in the state. This often came to light when the Arizona Cardinals football team was so christened and people thought the name didn't make a lot of sense. I can't judge them for this lack of awareness, for as I typed this, I had to look on the web to see if the

Cardinals were a baseball team or a football team. I'm not interested in sports. Ah, I see, the *Diamondbacks!* They are the baseball team.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 4 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			2		1								1			

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rather rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

Boyce Thompson Arboretum seems to be the best site.

Identification: A very orange bird. The male has a black head, black wings, and white wing patches. Giant seed-cracking beak.

Author's Notes:

This is among three other birds that at times can be confused because they are orange and similar in size: the western tanager (more yellow actually), the Bullock's oriole, and the hooded oriole. The other grosbeaks, the evening grosbeak, the blue grosbeak, and the rose-breasted grosbeak are also part of the database. They are

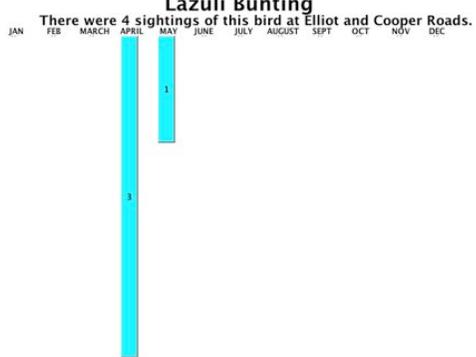
all rather interesting birds to see because of their giant beaks, and they are often present at bird feeders.

LAZULI BUNTING

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



1995-2011 Database: 4 Sightings



There were 4 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.

Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
							1					1				2

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Rather rare at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

The water ranch is the most likely bet.

Identification: The male is hard to misidentify. From a distance the turquoise head contrasts with the tan breast with white below. This gives it a three-tone look that is once seen easy to remember. The female is much plainer, but the finch beak, unstriated back, and sometimes a trace of the tan color on the breast can give her away.

Author's Notes:

It's funny how a sighting sticks in your mind. In 2002, I write:

Lazuli Bunting, 05/12/2002, Elliot and Cooper Roads, He was on a scraggly bush by the left-hand pond. This is a place life lister!!

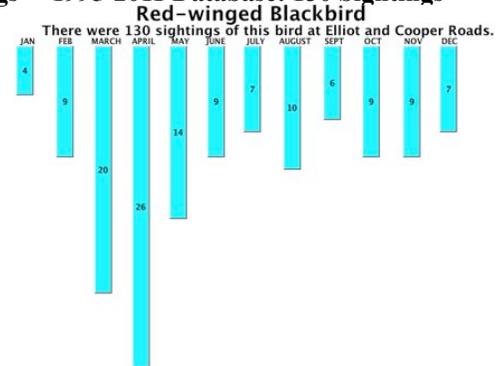
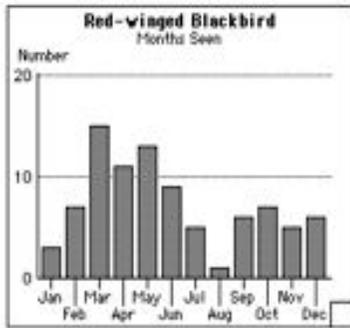
And nine years later, I have a feeling of *déjà vu* as I spot the bird again:

Lazuli Bunting, 4/10/2011, Elliot and Cooper Roads, Right where I first saw one. Male. Right on a snag—actually a young twig of a PV tree by Pond Ten. Some novice bird watchers saw it too. It perched and I could see the rusty chest and white etc.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 88 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 130 Sightings



95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1	2	31	25	10	12	6	3	15	5	3	6	2	4	1	4

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: I feel a little surprised that this bird was only seen 130 times, but the records are correct.

Other Sites to Try:

Loves fields and cattail marshes. Any site with these will do.

Identification: Adult male's bright red epaulettes make it unmistakable. Immature males have just a bit of yellowish red instead, and the color has a rather two or even three-toned look, a fact that makes some amateurs wonder whether these birds might be tricolored blackbirds, which are not found in Arizona. Female red-wings might be mistaken for large, heavily streaked sparrows. Look, however, at the longer, sharper blackbird bill so unlike the conical sparrow beak. The sprightly call of the male becomes quickly familiar and easy to recognize, and while bird calls cannot be written on a musical staff, the spirit of the red-wing blackbird's call is captured beautifully (though unintentionally) by the flute in "The Chinese Dance" from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*.

Author's Notes:

The blackbird family is strictly New World with its greatest diversity expressed the South American species. I have always thought that the Europeans and Asians are really missing out as I can't imagine a world without blackbirds. I know, of course, there are Old World families whose absence here impoverishes me just as much.

I remember listening to the Beatle song, "Blackbird" and hearing the bird song that was a part of the recording. It sure didn't sound like a blackbird to me. Paul McCartney, however, was correct. His song to encourage black girls ("Birds" as you certainly know are girls in English slang.) used the common name for the everyday front yard thrush of England, a bird which is essentially a pitch black robin.

Blackbirds fly in mixed species flocks and their teeming numbers make these flocks look often almost gnat-like. Often I have driven to work and cursed my inconvenient timetable as a grainy cloud of them boiled over the freeway headed southeast—always southeast in the morning. At the cocktail hour, the waves of blackbirds fly northwest and many is the time that I have sat out waiting to set my beer down and raise my binocs to look into the

wavy lines of birds in an attempt to pick out the redwings from the Brewer’s blackbirds. When I see black and gray birds together, I take it that I am looking at male and female brown-headed cowbirds, but I am not often completely certain with my identification; the birds are too far away and too small—except for the yellow-headed blackbirds, which cannot help but give themselves away with their bright heads and larger bodies.

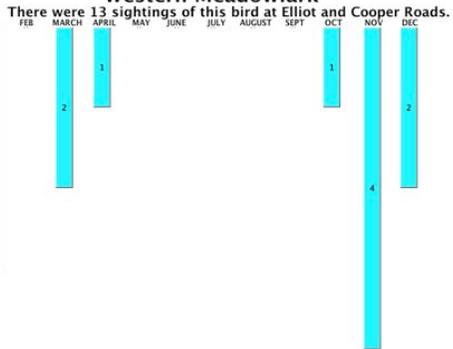
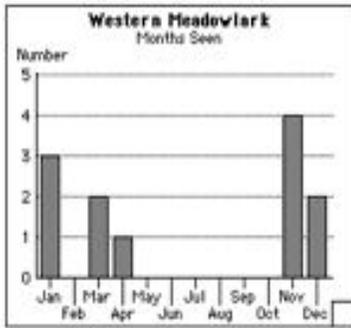
For fifty years, I have seen these flocks and wondered what enchantment lay to the east in the morning and what allure drew the birds westward in the last minutes of every afternoon.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK

1995-2003 Database: 12 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 13 Sightings

Western Meadowlark



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			8	3	1			1								

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not seen at the site in many years probably because of the loss of the field on the south side of the ponds.

Other Sites to Try:

Anywhere there are fields. Likes to sit on posts.

Identification: Although a blackbird, the meadowlark is a screaming yellow bird with a black bib. The rest of it is brownish or white and spotted with black. When you disturb the bird, it flies off, revealing its characteristic white outer tail feathers. But it doesn't often go far. It's a fairly weak flyer—it seems to me at least—and there is an uncertain wobble in the wingtips that gives it the appearance of being a fledgling that is somewhat unaccustomed to flight. Its call, "Chandler's* a pretty little town" is a familiar sound even to many non-birders.

*You can insert the name of your favorite town if you like.

Author's Notes:

In the days before air conditioned cars, we used to drive across the continent, windows open, and the call of the meadowlark would seem to jump from the bird's fencepost and sound within the car itself as if we had caught its voice and driven off with it at 60 miles an hour.

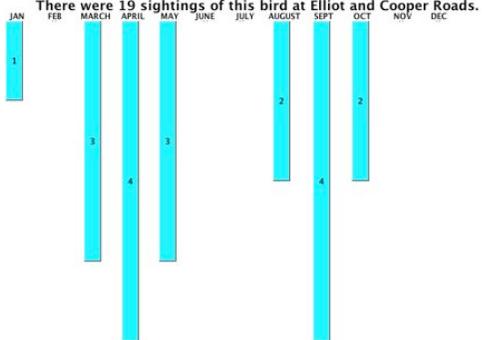
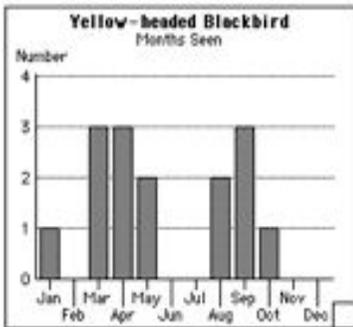
YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 15 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 19 Sightings

Yellow-headed Blackbird

There were 19 sightings of this bird at Elliot and Cooper Roads.



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
		1	9	3	2				3						1	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Seen only once in the last seven years. Perhaps this has to do with the loss of the field to the south of the ponds.

Other Sites to Try:

Notes show it as sporadically seen in various places. The Water Ranch is the only other place where it has been seen a number of times.

Identification: The male has a bright yellow head and breast, a black body, and white wing patches. The female is brownish and less colorful but has a yellow breast and some yellow on the face. This is a fairly big bird.

Author's Notes:

Seen on my very first official bird trip, the yellow-headed blackbird is a favorite of mine because of its colorful feathers. I have often stopped to look at a flock of blackbirds on a lawn and noticed that one or two were yellow-headed blackbirds—males or females.

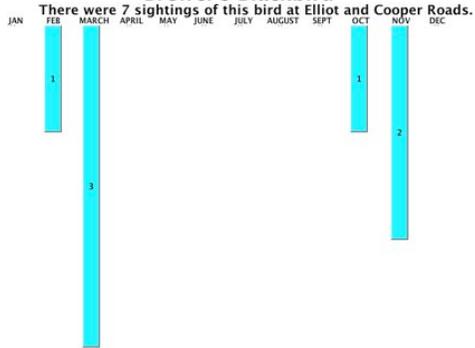
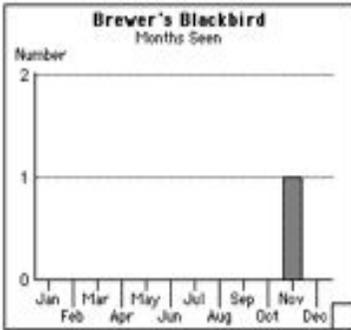
While other blackbirds have a pleasant song, this one does not. It has an unpleasant, raspy croak that has been described as sounding something like a rusty hinge.

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to tell a rather poignant story of a blackbird. My father's lifelong best friend told of a blackbird, a grackle I believe, that showed up every morning to drop from its beak a pellet of excrement into his bird bath in Rhode Island. The pellet was always covered with a gelatinous film and was obviously that of a nestling that the bird was caring for. The adult was keeping the nest clean by removing such droppings. The bird arrived every day at the same time to make its delivery. One day, my father's friend was saddened when the bird arrived as usual and dropped the carcass of the nestling in the water.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting

1995-2011 Database: 7 Sightings
Brewer's Blackbird



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
							1			1			1	1	2	1

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not very common at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

I used to see this bird often at McQueen and Elliot Roads a mile from the site. The high school to the south had an area where they raised pigs, and cowbirds and Brewer's blackbirds liked it there. I remember often seeing the bird at Arizona State University, but there are no recent records for that site. Look in stockyards for the Brewer's and cowbirds.

Identification: Look for the pearl-white eye. The male is glossy black with a purplish, iridescent head. The female is gray and rather nondescript.

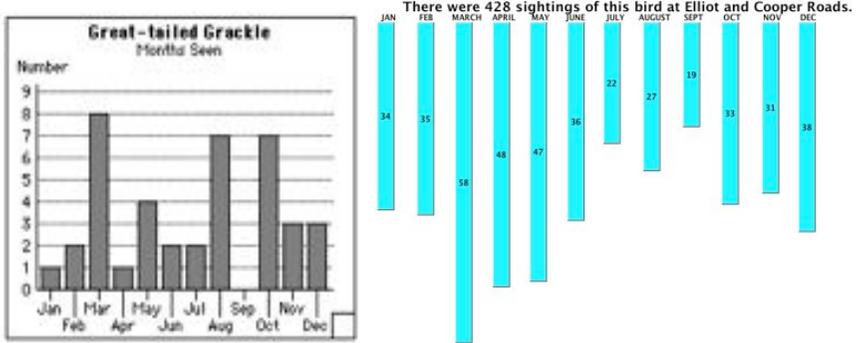
Author's Notes:

My habit has always been to look at the sky in the very late afternoon to see the flocks of blackbirds fly by. Although they are

hard to identify, I often persuade myself to write down the Brewer's in my notebook. In Utah, the bird is common and thus despised by my sister, who lives there, but its general rarity here makes it a favorite of mine.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE

1995-2003 Database: 40 Sightings 1995-2011 Database: 428 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		12	15	7	1	2	13	63	33	12	24	12	41	114	78

Notes/General Conclusions from Data:

The fact that there are only 40 records for 438 trips to Elliot and Cooper Roads in the first database illustrates just how lackadaisical I was in recording one of the most common of all birds at the site. It's missing entirely in September!

However, the graph on the above right, although it includes the earlier less accurate numbers, is not very much skewed from what you might expect to see of sightings in months which have a varying number of visits.

The smallest number of these grackles appears in the July bar in the graph above. This is in keeping with what is seen in the bird numbers data at the beginning of the book, where July was recorded as the month with the lowest number of all bird sightings. (See Figure 9.) The above graph rather closely matches the graph

in Figure 9. The addition of 388 records to the 40 in August of 2003 have obviously made the 40 haphazardly recorded sightings almost insignificant.

Other Sites to Try:

Anywhere.

Identification: The male of this giant, spirited blackbird has a huge tail, purplish sheen, and yellow-white eye. The female is also large but mostly brown and with a smaller tail. The sexual dimorphism of the bird sometimes makes casual observers assume that the male and female are two different species.

Author's Notes:

The great-tailed grackle first invaded the Phoenix area in the 1950s and later became a familiar part of the Valley's birdscape. The bird brings a tropical flavor to the suburbs with its jungle sounds. This large bird makes itself at home on the flats at Elliot and Cooper Roads, a fact that somehow bothers me. It's a personal preference, but I would rather he stayed in the trees than darkened the clean, shallow water areas that I would prefer were reserved for the traditional shorebirds. I know why the grackles may be there, however: they are able to snatch minnows from the water like a heron, a skill that seems unusual for a blackbird.

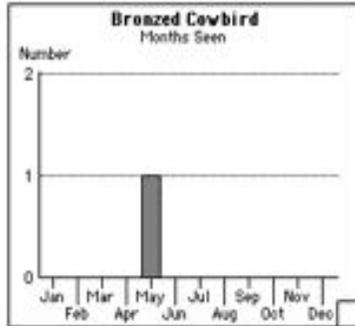
Every now and then, I hear a person talking about these birds who says that they look rather like crows because they are closely related. But grackles are in the blackbird family, which is present only in the Americas. Crows and jays exist in both the Old and New Worlds (except for crested jays like the New World's bluejay and Steller's jay). To sum up, grackles are not related to crows at all, much less closely so.

Because of its size, the great-tailed grackle can intimidate even the spirited mocking bird. Only the common street pigeon is big

enough to stand up to the great-tailed grackle, and I have always felt there was a great animosity shared between those two birds.

BRONZED COWBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 1 Sighting



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
							1									

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Only one sighted.

Other Sites to Try:

Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Arizona State University, the Phoenix Zoo

Identification: It looks as though someone had fashioned a little cap out of feathers and set it on top of the bird's head; the head appears to have a ruffled helmet. Look for the cashew-like curve to a beak which seems cracked slightly open. Eyes are ruby red. Male and female similar with the female's feathers more gray overall and the male's wings darker.

Author's Notes:

The notes for Elliot and Cooper Roads sighting give good identification information:

Bronzed Cowbird,05/18/2002,*Elliot and Cooper Roads,He was on the wire on the east side. His funny beak gave him away. Also the red eye.*

Surprisingly, one of my best sites for the bronzed cowbird is Arizona State University. Here are some database notes attached some sightings of the bird.

Bronzed Cowbird,8/12/2001,*Arizona State University*

Bronzed Cowbird,7/11/2001,*Arizona State University,Anniversary of Mom's death. At Irish Hall.*

Bronzed Cowbird,06/04/2001,*Arizona State University,Male and female. Male black. At Mariposa Hall.*

Bronzed Cowbird,5/24/2001,*Arizona State University,Mariposa Hall Male and female. Classic look just like in the book with the female the correct Arizona color.*

Bronzed Cowbird,7/21/2000,*Arizona State University,back Friday*

Bronzed Cowbird,7/19/2000,*Arizona State University,He was back again. Sonny and Steve came to the office and Sonny scared him away.*

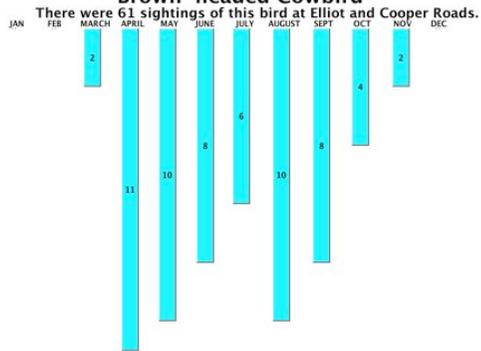
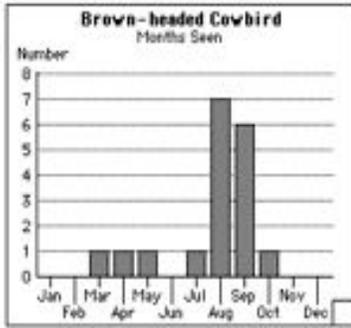
Bronzed Cowbird,7/14/2000,*Arizona State University,back again*

Bronzed Cowbird,7/13/2000,*Arizona State University,This bird was out on the lawn in the courtyard of Mariposa Hall. RED EYES.*

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD

1995-2003 Database: 18 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 61 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			4	8	4	1	1		5	2	2	3	3	3	18	7

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: No sightings at all from December through February.

Other Sites to Try:

There are in all 166 records for the bird in many sites. The Water Ranch has the greatest number.

Identification: A small blackbird. Male is black with a brownish head. The female is a very nondescript bird and beginners often are confused by this drab, gray, sparrow-like bird that looks very different from the male.

Author's Notes:

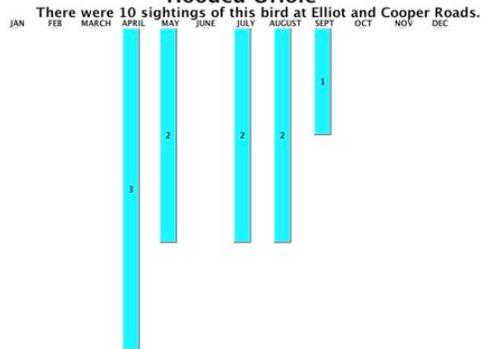
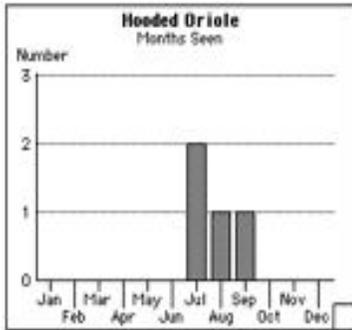
At Canyon Lake once I sat at a picnic table and was surprised to see brown-headed cowbirds coming up to get pieces of bread as would any house sparrow. It was perhaps my closest look at these birds and I was struck by their small size but also by their cool, torpedo-like shape. At Elliot and Cooper Roads, these birds will fill

a tree, and from it will come an orchestral sound of their strange buzzes and clicks.

HOODED ORIOLE

1995-2003 Database: 4 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 10 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
					2			2	1			1				4

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not especially common at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

The best site seems to be the Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Identification: For me the greenish tint to the female’s tail is always a clue. Look for a sharp, curved beak. The male has a black throat and tail, white wing bars, and a golden crown. The male’s overall color can be yellow or even a darker orange.

Author's Notes:

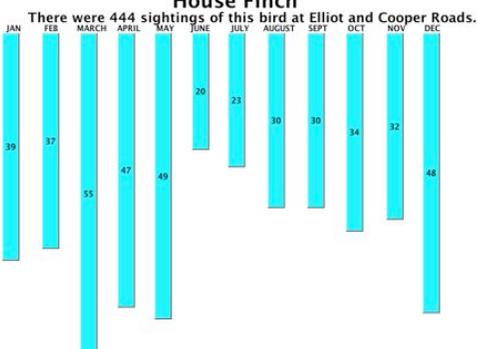
One summer day, I had to go rescue my brother and nephew when their car broke down at Apache Lake. Here is the hooded oriole sighted at that time with the note attached to it.

Hooded Oriole, 06/28/2002, Apache Lake, Oh there were more than one and they hung upside down under the resort eaves.

HOUSE FINCH

1995-2003 Database: 42 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 444 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
	1		11	11	7	4	6	13	46	29	20	27	16	50	117	86

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Certainly one of the most common species seen at the site and present all year round.

Other Sites to Try:

Almost anywhere and often seen in large flocks.

Identification: The female has a heavily streaked breast, the male streaks on its sides. Look for the conical finch beak. The male has a red, purplish, or orange breast, head, and rump. These colors vary quite a lot, and you will often see a blood red coloration or something quite orange. Listen for the long, busy song.

Author's Notes:

This bird's song is quite melodic but I feel about it the same way the king felt when he listened to Mozart's opera in *Amadeus*. Mozart asks the king if he likes his opera. The king tells him yes of course he does.

JOSEPH

Of course I do. It's very good. Of course now and then - just now and then - it gets a touch....

MOZART

What do you mean, Sire?

JOSEPH

... How shall one say, Director?

ORSINI-ROSENBERG

Too many notes, Your Majesty?

JOSEPH

Exactly. Very well put. Too many notes.

MOZART

I don't understand. There are just as many notes, Majesty, as are required. Neither more nor less.

JOSEPH

My dear fellow, there are in fact only so many notes the ear can hear in the course of an evening.

MOZART

But this is absurd!

JOSEPH

My dear, young man, don't take it too hard. Your work is ingenious. It's quality work. And there are simply too many notes, that's all. Cut a few and it will be perfect.

MOZART

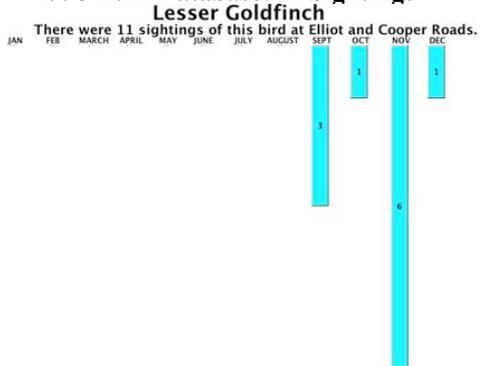
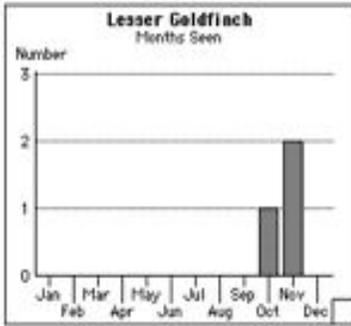
Which few did you have in mind, Majesty?

Of the house finch's song, then, I say: My dear house finch, your song is ingenious. It's a quality song. And there are simply too many notes, that's all. Cut a few and it will be perfect.

LESSER GOLDFINCH

1995-2003 Database: 3 Sightings

1995-2011 Database: 11 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			1		1		1		1	2		2			3	

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: Not very common at the site.

Other Sites to Try:

The Boyce Thompson Arboretum is often alive with them and the Water Ranch has many sightings as well.

Identification: There is a black-backed race, but the green-backed is the only that has been sighted here. The bird is small and yellow, and when it flies, it seems to me that the wings flash as if there were white patches. The male has a black cap.

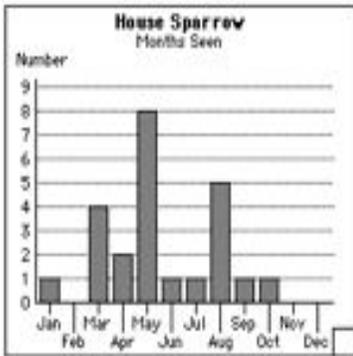
Author's Notes:

Just a sighting with its notes:

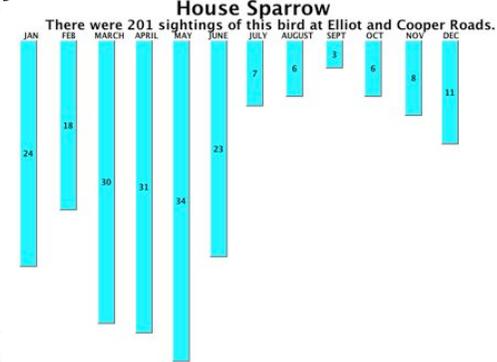
Lesser Goldfinch, 11/29/2002, Elliot and Cooper Roads, Jeff and Noodles and I went here. This is the day after Thanksgiving. These goldfinches were just little green birdies but some were yellow and more traditional lessers with the black cap and all. Kind of ratty. Oh. They were in the sunflowers on the east end of the place. Where else?

HOUSE SPARROW

1995-2003 Database: 24 Sightings



1995-2011 Database: 201 Sightings



Number of Sightings by Year May 1995-May 2011

95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
			6	7	4		7	2	17	5	5	11	1	14	60	62

Notes/General Conclusions from Data: The bird has been surprisingly uncommon considering how ubiquitous it is. This says something for the natural habitat of the site as the house sparrow loves urban areas and trash cans. Recently it has been showing up in the bushes near the dumpster behind the fire station. This accounts in part for the greater number of sightings in the last three years.

Other Sites to Try:

Absolutely anywhere there are people. Likes dumpsters.

Identification: Unpleasant squawking call. Male has a black bib and is rather milk chocolate on the back. Female is quite plain. No streaking like a house finch but has a similar seed cracking bill.

Author's Notes:

Kaufman says that these spunky introduced birds are a plus in urban areas where but for them there would be no birds at all. It's hard to disagree with that. Upon occasion, I have caught one and found that they bite quite hard. As children, my brothers and I had two nestlings that we raised at home. We named them Spar and Row. We taught them to fly. One day, Spar and Row flew away and we chased them down the street in vain.



Afterword

No new species have been added to the Elliot and Cooper Roads life list as I write today although the total number of trips has risen to 1103, and I will continue to visit despite the changes that have begun to take place at the site.

Since the volume of water being put into the ponds was decreased in 2003, the site has lain mostly fallow for many years. Putting in solar panels to create electricity is one way to make best use of the area. Heavy equipment is leveling all of the northern ponds as well as most of the central ponds. Ponds 3, 4, 8, 9, and 10 are so far untouched, and workmen tell me they will remain as they are. The affected ponds are littered with giant boxes that read "Sun Tek," apparently the company name of the manufacturer whose products are being installed. The workmen say that the ponds can still be flooded, but I know that with the solar panels covering the land, the area will not be as attractive to visiting shorebirds looking for landing spots—and one's view will be obscured in any case.

I do not despair. It has been a long time coming, and the majority of the ponds have been essentially dry for many years, so this change is not too hard an adjustment to make. As long as the pond behind the fire station is left alone, I will still have a place to go, and I can hardly complain that I have missed out on what the site has had to offer these last seventeen years.

Next month I will turn sixty, and I will take stock of the time that remains to me and consider other studies. I remember a story about a biologist who as a young grad student began to take pictures of lichen that covered the rocks in desert areas. He continued this effort for decades (for decades was how long such a study required) to determine how the lichen grew, how fast, in what season, etc. Another biologist I know has mapped off a portion of desert, assigned each part of it to a grid, and recorded the plants' and animals' goings on there for decades. With any luck, I can do something similar.

And perhaps one day we will see the revised edition of this book with the subtitle "Forty Years of Bird Processing on One Street Corner of the World."

Tom Cole
July 18, 2011

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Index

The following index does not include the most common sites for birding as they are so often cited that their inclusion would not be helpful; that is to say, listing 100 page numbers after a site like the Water Ranch serves little purpose. Seldom mentioned sites and those sites that no longer exist, however, are indeed included. No birds from the Table of Contents pages or the Alphabetical Bird Index are a part of the index, but all of the other birds that have been mentioned in the text are listed.

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