Navajo-Hopi Country and the High Desert

Much of the broad expanse of high desert east and north of Flagstaff is covered with pinyon-juniper woodland, high desert scrub or sparse grassland. Northeastern Arizona has dramatic panoramas punctuated by mesas, buttes, canyons, cinder cones, mountains, forests and lakes. The isolated riparian areas and reservoirs draw a wide variety of birds and other wildlife.

The largest percentage of land in the northeast corner of Arizona belongs to the Hopi or Navajo nations. Other lands are managed by federal agencies. A small percentage is privately owned.

Reservation lands can provide a wide variety of birds, many not seen in the rest of Arizona, including the Northern Shrike, Black-billed Magpie (Teea Nos Pos), and vagrant Eastern birds. Western Meadowlark and Horned Lark breed in the heavily grazed grassland. According to Bud Johnson (see “Additional Information” below) Mourning Dove, Common Nighthawk, Say’s Phoebe, Northern Mockingbird, Bendire’s Thrasher, Sage Thrasher, Loggerhead Shrike, House Finch, Vesper, Black-throated, Sage, and Brewer’s Sparrows breed in the dry scrub. Forested areas have birds found in habitats similar to those near Flagstaff such as Walnut Canyon.

Planning Your Visit
The map at the beginning of this chapter is a detail showing sites on the reservations. For sites north of Cameron see the map inside the back cover.

This guide identifies only a few of the more rewarding sites in northeastern Arizona. We suggest combining several destinations, with one or more overnight stays. As time allows be sure to include other stops like the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, Walpi on the Hopi Mesas, and Navajo National Monument.
Since our readers will have widely varying itineraries, we will not give specific directions from Flagstaff: you will need to consult other travel aids. First you need a good map. The authors prefer the "Guide to Indian Country" published by the Automobile Club of Southern California. It is available at Flagstaff bookstores, at the Visitor Centers of National Park Service sites and through the www.spma.org website. The map has excellent detail including the names of topographic features. On the back is a travel guide: our readers will be especially interested in the "Points of Interest," which lists the best-known tourist attractions, phone number for additional information, and a number showing the location on the map. Also see the section "The People" for an introduction to the various southwestern tribes and "Wilderness Trips" for tour information.

For information on accommodations you can contact the Flagstaff Visitor Center, 928-774-9541, downtown in the old train station or consult a guidebook.

**Travel Tips**
When traveling from any other part of Arizona between the months of April and October set your watch ahead one hour as you enter the Navajo Reservation. While the Navajo Reservation observes Daylight Savings Time — just like the rest of the country — the Hopi Reservation and remainder of Arizona do not. Don't worry, Arizonans find this confusing too.

Birdwatching is not yet widespread on the reservations. While birders are common in the heavily visited areas we mention here, in more remote areas you may be the first birder a local resident has met. Be an ambassador for birdwatching.

On tribal lands practice polite and reserved behavior. Attempting to photograph local residents, their houses or animals is considered very impolite. Also give special thought to the direction you point your binoculars.

Unless you are visiting a National Park Service site or a place with evidence of public use, treat all lands as if privately owned.

Northeastern Arizona is sparsely populated outside the commercial areas. Allow for a margin of error when filling your gas tank. Prepare for the unexpected: carry snacks, plenty of water, and a layer of warm clothes.
Additional Information

Rangers at Hubbell Trading Post can direct you to nearby birding areas. Birding information at Canyon de Chelly is less certain at this time, but the rangers recently directed us to seek out a campground host who was especially knowledgeable. Ask around.

The authors were aided by the following invaluable resources:

Chuck LaRue, Northern Arizona Audubon Society member who lived and worked on the Navajo Reservation for many years. We referred to his article, “Birds of Northern Black Mesa, Navajo County, Arizona,” Great Basin Naturalist, January 1994, and consulted him regularly.

Bud Johnson, Maricopa Audubon Society member and fieldtrip leader, has birded the Reservations for many years. His article in the May-June 1998 issue of the chapter newsletter, Cactus Wrendition, was invaluable.

Brad Jacobs’ book Birding on the Navajo and Hopi Reservations was published in 1986. It’s sadly out of print.

Ganado

Ganado is a traditional trading crossroads. The major point of interest is the Hubbell Trading Post, a National Historic Site. Here the Pueblo Colorado Wash provides excellent bird habitat featuring both towering cottonwoods and brushy riparian vegetation, excellent during spring migration and again from mid-August to mid-October. Birdwatchers will also want to visit Ganado Lake for ducks and warblers and other species.

Directions: Ganado is about 140 miles east-northeast of Flagstaff. Travel east on I-40 and north on US 191. Or for a more scenic route go north and east from Winona on Navajo 15 through the communities of Leupp, Dilkon, Bidadari, Lower Greasewood and Cornfields, a visual feast from the very start.

The Trading Post

The Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site is five miles east of the intersection of Navajo 15 and AZ 264. The authors are especially fond of this place. The trading post is operated much as it was 100 years ago and sometimes sells locally made treats such as dried apricot turnovers, worth a trip in themselves. In summer the park employs Navajo weavers to demonstrate traditional rug-making techniques. The famous Ganado rugs and other handmade crafts are available for sale. Also visit Hubbell’s home.
For the best birding the rangers recommend walking downstream along the Pueblo Colorado Wash in the direction of Hubbell Hill. In this area, which is very birdy during migration, eastern warblers and other vagrants are seen regularly enough to expand the Arizona Bird Checklist considerably. Bud Johnson calls this one of the best riparian areas on the reservation.

As you walk upstream you will see evidence of a project begun in 1997 to restore erosional damage. The damage was caused in part by overgrazing, failure of previous restoration efforts, loss of native riparian vegetation, and invasion of Russian olive, tamarisk and other exotic vegetation. The project uses water at flood stages and simple hand made structures called baffles and riffles to reestablish a meander pattern. Vegetation is removed in some areas and added in others to assist in washing out sediments in some places and redepositing them in the next meander. Retired U.S. Forest Service Biologist Bill Zeedyk calls this practice “Induced Meandering.” Monitoring has shown early success in regenerating native vegetation and returning the stream to a healthier state.

**Ganado Lake**

To reach Ganado Lake drive two miles east from Hubbell Trading Post on AZ 264 and turn north on Navajo 27 toward Nazlini. The left turnoff to the dam is only a short distance.

First drive to the far end of the dam and park so that you can walk to the top of the dam, look at the many ducks and grebes and check the mudflats. Western Grebes have nested on the lake. While walking up the dirt road look for sparrows in the weedy upslope.

Below the spillway a thicket of willow and tamarisk is quickly becoming reestablished following the recent dam rebuilding effort. Look for a surprising array of warblers resting and “tanking up” on the way to their summer or winter destinations.

Drive back to the east end of the dam and walk the lake edge toward the conspicuous grove of mature cottonwood. From this vantage you may see Killdeer, American Avocet, Spotted Sandpiper and dabblers. Check the cottonwoods for migrants and raptors.

If you are continuing your trip in the direction of Chinle and Canyon de Chelly National Monument consider taking the back way for an added treat. From Ganado Lake turn left on Navajo 27. Wind your way past Wood Spring and the Nazlini Boarding School, down an escarpment with views of buttes and hoodoos dramatically lit in late afternoon. The pavement soon ends and the graded dirt road crosses a sparsely vegetated plain; when
you come to a fork, take the right side. When you reach the “T” intersection with the Chinle Kindergarten Center on your right, turn right to Canyon de Chelly.

**Area Lakes**

*A number of washes in the Ganado and Chinle areas have been damned to create reservoirs, any of which is likely to provide an endless number and variety of migrating ducks and shorebirds, well worth a stop.*

*These lakes, however, are an environmental mixed blessing for two reasons. First, they catch an unusually high load of sediment following flash floods common to the Southwestern high desert. The resulting siltation soon provokes temptations to raise the dams and create broader if shallower lakes. We have seen this at its worst at Many Farms Lake north of Chinle. In 1986 Brad Jacobs (see introduction to this chapter) described this lake as the best place to see birds on the reservations. In September 2000 a number of migrating water birds were present — American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, dowitchers, White Pelicans and various gulls. But much of the shoreline and upslope vegetation has been disturbed or obliterated by a project to raise the dam height. Of course Many Farms Lake may return to its former glory in time. Ultimately the lake will silt up again.*

*The other downside to dam building, in this as well as other areas, is altering the downstream riparian habitat. Before Tsaile Lake Dam was built above Canyon de Chelly National Monument, for example, the stream in Canyon del Muerto carried a rich load of sediment reseeding the cottonwood groves and revitalizing traditional agricultural lands. Now these sediments collect behind the dam.*

**Canyon de Chelly**

Canyon de Chelly (pronounced d'shay) National Monument, is a place of great beauty. Soaring red sandstone cliffs rise in places 1000 feet above the sandy canyon floor. From the many overlooks you can look down on Anasazi ruins, grasses, cottonwood groves and small Navajo farms. White-throated Swifts zoom by in season. The two washes that carve the canyon merge near the park entrance and support large groves of Russian olive, tamarisk and cottonwoods, home to riparian species and rest stop for migrating passerines.
**Directions:** Chinle and Canyon de Chelly are approximately 175 miles northeast of Flagstaff, 30 miles north of Ganado. Take I-40 east and US 191 north, or Navajo 15 east from Winona and either US 191 or Navajo 27 north from Ganado.

The canyon floor is accessible only if you are accompanied by a Park Ranger or an authorized Navajo guide: inquire at the Visitor Center. The best way to see a good portion of the canyon, including petroglyphs and cliff dwellings, is to take a tour from Thunderbird Lodge, 800-679-2473, reservations recommended. These tours are conducted in 6-wheel drive vehicles. An expert guide tells the story of Navajo life and the sad history of forced relocation on the reservation.

There is, however, one place to go into the canyon unaccompanied. You can walk into the canyon at White House Ruin, a short hike not to be missed. This is a good opportunity to check out the plant and animal communities of the sandstone cliffs and the cottonwoods and grasses of the canyon floor. This walk begins at a marked parking lot on the South Rim Drive. If you later continue to the end of South Rim you will be rewarded with some of the very best canyon views and will experience the calm majesty of Spider Rock, a sandstone spire sacred to the Navajo. We have seen Peregrine Falcon there at dusk.

The best birding is around the campground and lodge where you will see nesting Bullock’s Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeak and Common Nighthawk among other birds. Like at Pueblo Colorado Wash in Ganado, eastern vagrants show up routinely.
Also check the corral and other birdy-looking places between the entrance and Thunderbird Lodge. The groves of Russian olive provide important winter forage for thrushes.

Keams Canyon

Keams Canyon with a population of 400 is near the eastern boundary of the Hopi Reservation, which is completely surrounded by the larger Navajo Reservation. Keams Canyon Wash has been dammed in several places. The open water and riparian corridor with nearby rocky ledges and high desertscrub habitat attract a broad range of bird life. Brad Jacobs says:

While the area has produced a Brown Thrasher, Philadelphia and Red-eyed Vireos and Zone-tailed Hawk, it is most rewarding in the abundance of bird life and the ease of seeing the birds...Blue Grosbeaks, Virginia's Warblers, Cassin's Kingbirds, Brewer's Sparrows and wrens nest in the canyon, while Sage Sparrows, Western Scrub-Jays, Black-throated Gray Warblers, Pinyon Jays, Sage Thrashers and occasionally Scott's Orioles can be seen in the sage and juniper above the canyon walls.

In addition Chuck LaRue has also seen Broad-winged Hawk, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler and Tropical Kingbird.

Directions: Keams Canyon is on AZ 264 about 100 miles northeast of Flagstaff as the crow flies. If you are approaching directly from Flagstaff, a good route is to travel east on Navajo 1 S from Winona, north on AZ 87, and east on AZ 264.

To sample the variety of habitats in and near Keams Canyon, turn east off AZ 264 on the street near the convenience store: this is mile 0. Turn right at the first intersection after crossing the little bridge and left at the next intersection opposite the post office flagpole. The street you are on follows the wash through town. Stop at either of the two white footbridges, now in disrepair, to check for birds in the trees bordering the wash.

At mile 0.7 jog left then join the main road continuing uphill past the Catholic Church. The wash is on your right. The low area on the right, a former picnic area, has burned recently and is not very productive at this time. But continue up toward the first dam at mile 1.2, which holds back a body of open water edged by coyote willow and cottonwoods. Walk out on the dam and check the nearby vegetation. A little farther ahead at mile 1.6 is a typical sagebrush flat. The reservoir above the second dam is silted in and has a good growth of cattails. The dense thicket at the downstream base of the dam harbors a hidden pool worth checking.
At mile 2.0 park opposite the metal shed sheltering stone inscriptions made by Kit Carson's soldiers. After examining the pinyon-juniper on the cliff ledges, and checking overhead for Red-tailed Hawk and other raptors, walk through the rabbitbrush towards the cottonwood grove, looking for Green-tailed Towhee and sparrows (fall migration). During migration search the cottonwoods for warblers, including MacGillivray's and Wilson's, and Cordilleran Flycatcher. As time allows drive farther up the wash stopping at any place that looks promising.

**Tuba City Area**

Check any of Tuba City's public places such as schoolyards for birds. A short side trip to the west takes you to the village of West Moenave with orchards and garden plots, gravity-irrigated from springs emanating from the base of Tuba Butte. Near the eastern city limits is a popular recreational spot, Pasture Canyon. Nesting and migrating riparian species can be found in the canyon's moist herbaceous growth and numerous mature cottonwoods. Ducks and grebes may be seen on the small reservoir upstream, especially during migration.

**Directions:** Tuba City is on US 160, ten miles east of the intersection with US 89.

**West Moenave**

The turnoff from US 160, Navajo 23 to Moenave, is five miles east of the intersection with US 89 and five miles west of Tuba City. The intersection is marked with a faint sign to Moenave, but the most prominent signage is for the Dinosaur Tracks. (Yes, real dinosaur tracks, very clear, very near the road. A guide will point them out to you for a gratuity, well worth a stop.) Drive north on the graded dirt road. At mile 2.7 from the US 160 turnoff, turn left at the "T" and in about half a mile you will reach a beautiful pastoral area, complete with aged orchards and vineyards, nestled at the base of red cliffs. You can view examples of the traditional dry farming practiced among the Navajo and Hopi in remote areas. Park near the crest of the hill under the ancient cottonwoods.

Stay to the public road being careful to protect the villagers' privacy. A stone-lined irrigation channel crosses under the road nearby. The orchards and vines appear to be largely untended except by the numerous birds. We have seen Black Phoebe, Western Tanager, Cedar Waxwing in large numbers, Townsend's Solitaire, Lesser Goldfinch, Western Wood-Pewee, House Wren and Virginia's Warbler, to give a sense of the variety and abundance
possible here. After walking a short distance up and down the road checking for birds, return to your car. You can drive back the way you came and continue towards Tuba City. Otherwise continuing west on Navajo 23 will take you to US 89.

Pasture Canyon
It’s best to visit this area on weekdays when there are fewer people. Although heavily grazed and roaded it can produce some pretty decent birds, especially during migration.

From the main crossroads in Tuba City — the traffic light at AZ 264/Main Street and US 160 — go east on US 160 about one mile to where the cottonwoods are close to the highway. Turn left (north) just past the “city limits” sign and drive on the braided dirt roads up the drainage keeping the bulk of the cottonwoods on your left. Once into the cottonwoods park and walk around checking for migrating MacGillivray’s, Wilson’s and Yellow Warblers, and orioles.

From here drive farther up the drainage, a total of about a mile from the highway, with a sandstone bluff on your right and the cottonwoods on your left. When you reach the rip-rapped downstream face of the dam go around it to your left. During migration the reservoir’s shore may have waders or shorebirds and various swallows hawking for insects. The shallow lake also provides food and rest for American Coot, Great Blue Heron, Virginia Rail, dowitcher species, Pintail, Ruddy Duck, Gadwall, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Pied-billed Grebe and Canada Goose. Greater White-fronted Goose, Dunlin, Franklin’s Gull, and Caspian Tern have also been seen here during migration. After scanning the lake and its verges return to US 160 the way you came.
Cameron

Cameron Trading Post is an oasis not only for tour buses and hungry travelers but also for resident and migrating songbirds. Behind the old trading post building, now a gallery, is an attractively landscaped garden complete with mature trees and irrigated plantings attractive to birds. A former truck route across the Little Colorado River provides access to some perennial seeps with cattails and an unexpected assemblage of birds. Rimmy Jim Tank about 12 miles south is another migrant trap.

**Directions:** Cameron is about 50 miles north of Flagstaff on US 89. The trading post is a little north of the junction with AZ 64, which leads to the Desert View Entrance to the Grand Canyon’s South Rim.

**Trading Post Grounds**
The inviting courtyard garden behind the gallery has sandstone walks, benches and picnic tables. In about the third week in May a couple of mulberry trees are a haven for migrants feeding on the ripe fruit. In summer check the trumpet vine for hummingbirds: Broad-tailed and Black-chinned are most likely, but other species are also possible. Lucy’s and Yellow Warblers may be found in summer and Black-throated Gray, Wilson’s and Nashville during migration. Flycatchers are well represented with Black and Say’s Phoebes, Cassin’s and Western Kingbirds and Ash-throated Flycatcher. If you see an oriole it could be Hooded, Bullock’s or even Scott’s. Western Tanager and Black-headed Grosbeak visit the gnarled apple trees during fall migration. Also look around the motel grounds for Chipping, Lincoln’s and Brewer’s Sparrows during migration. Actually almost any western riparian or backyard species might show up.

**Little Colorado River Riparian Area**
When leaving the parking lot go directly east across US 89 towards the mobile home park and take a quick left. This former “overweight truck route” has been closed due to safety concerns. Park by the bar gate near the trailer court and walk down the road about 350 yards to just before the road bends left. Seeps from beneath the ledges on the left attract many birds. Look over the tops of the tamarisk on the downhill side of the road for warblers and any of the puzzling empidonax flycatchers. Over the past five years this spot has produced Eastern Phoebe, Varied Thrush, Northern Parula, Tennessee, Kentucky, Black-throated Blue and Prothonotary Warblers, Swamp and Fox Sparrows. The brush here may be dripping with warblers in mid-to late August.

Continue walking down to the bridge. You can look upstream and down, but the changeable riverbed and sterile sandbars may be unproductive.

Backtrack along the road forty or fifty yards, turn right and walk about twenty yards. You will be in a cleared area with a pond on your right, a
high bank in front of you and a bulldozed six-foot bank on your left. Scramble over the six-foot bank, and in this very unlikely spot overhung by dense tamarisk you will see a tiny pool fed by perennial seeps. This spot draws birds which, given the surrounding desert landscape, seem other-worldly. On a recent visit we were amazed and delighted to see a Sora placidly foraging in the cattail patch.

Returning to the cleared area you can cross the road, go around the pipe gate, and walk up the scraped road a couple of hundred yards to check the tamarisk for warblers and flycatchers. When you've seen enough plod back up the road to your vehicle.

**Rimmy Jim Tank**

Rimmy Jim Tank, another unlikely destination, is a locally famous migrant trap. Practically anything can — and does — turn up here: vagrant warblers, phalaropes, Peregrine and Prairie Falcons, Great Horned Owl. Resident Horned Larks come to drink. The best months to visit are May and August-September. During the rare cool rainy mornings that occasionally grace this arid land in early fall, the tamarisk may seem to be alive with birds. Painted Bunting, Brown Thrasher and even Sabine’s Gull have been seen.

From Cameron go south on US 89 about 12 miles. Turn left (east) just beyond mile marker 455 on the paved road. Drive 0.2 mile and turn left onto a red dirt road heading northeast toward the tamarisk. Just past the cattle tank, turn left and park near the earthen dam.

**Lees Ferry**

At an elevation of 3100 feet Lees Ferry is the lowest elevation of any destination in this book. The Colorado River just below Glen Canyon dam is unnaturally cold and clear. Before the dam creating Lake Powell was built the water was warmer and laden with silt imparting a reddish-brown color.
The native fish have suffered greatly, but trout and wintering ducks love this radically altered ecosystem. By mid-winter large flocks including Common Merganser, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Lesser and Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Bufflehead, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal and various other species are commonly seen. An odd find like the Long-tailed Duck seen in 1997 may turn up. Also look for Western, Eared and possibly Horned Grebes.

Lonely Dell, a historic ranch and orchard, attracts songbirds practically year-round. Interpretive signs and a walking tour booklet describe the significance of Lees Ferry to early transportation, mining and settlement. The National Recreation Area provides high quality visitor facilities. The natural setting with the Colorado River cutting through the conjunction of the Echo and Vermilion Cliffs is spectacular. Desertscrub and canyon species like Greater Roadrunner and Canyon and Rock Wrens can be seen beyond the edges of the riparian area.

**Directions:** The right turnoff to Lees Ferry is 14.2 miles northwest of the intersection of US 89 and 89A, just west of the Navajo Bridge crossing of the Colorado River. You’ll pass this spot if you visit the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.

If you’re short on time, follow this route to see all the high spots. From the turnoff, the entrance road passes a payment kiosk; a ranger told us that no fee or pass is required for day-use by non-fishermen. Follow signs to the launch ramp, park, and walk down to the river edge. In winter you can view the ducks; in summer look for activity around the Great Blue Heron nests on the far side. You may also get to enjoy watching river expeditions bound for the Grand Canyon put in — always interesting. The river at this point is broad with a gentle current.

**Native Vegetation Restoration**

At this writing the area downstream from the boat ramp is a tangled tamarisk grove, so riparian birds are not numerous. But the Grand Canyon Wildlands Council, the National Park Service and the Arizona Water Protection Fund have recently funded a tamarisk control program for the Colorado River and its tributaries here and in the Grand Canyon. Scheduled to start in Spring 2001, the program will remove ten acres of tamarisk and replace it with a beaver-proof stand of native cottonwoods and willows. Plant growth and changes in the bird community will be monitored over the next few years. This is an important pilot study.
Drive back up the same road about 0.6 mile to a four-way intersection. Turn right towards Lonely Dell Ranch Historic District, drive 0.2 mile and park. A walking tour booklet is available to borrow or purchase. It interprets the history of Lees Ferry, the Lee family and their successors, and the buildings that can be seen on your short walk. The large orchard on the right lends an idea of the Lees' efforts to grow fruit using water diverted from the nearby Paria River. Because of the irrigation and fruit trees you may see assorted neotropical passereses in migration and breeding Say's Phoebe, Bullock's Oriole and Western Kingbird. Continue to the irrigated ranch house yard; your booklet will explain the presence of the ancient mulberry tree.

When you return to the four-way intersection go straight along River Drive following the edge of the Colorado River downstream. Park at Paria Beach, about three-quarters of a mile past the intersection. In winter Common Goldeneye and American Wigeon are likely to be riding the waves below the riffle. Immediately downstream of the parking area a tamarisk thicket extends for a couple of hundred yards. If the water is low, you can walk the beach at the river's edge and pish up into the tamarisk until you reach the downstream end of the thicket and then work the uphill side back to your car. If the water is high, just work the uphill edge. Anything may show up in this spot so have an open mind and eyes. Swamp Sparrow and Eastern Phoebe are possible.

In addition to Chuck LaRue, John Grahame contributed information for this destination. In fact we are indebted to John for putting Lees Ferry on the map for Flagstaff area birders. He organizes a popular January raft trip from Glen Canyon Dam to Lees Ferry conducted about once every two years. On this trip you can see Barrow's Goldeneye at the base of the dam, perhaps one or two American Dippers, and the large assemblage of ducks. If interested consult the chapter website, www.nazas.org, in November or December to find out whether a trip is being offered and if so how you can participate.

On your return to US 89A you may want to turn out to see Navajo Bridge. Signs interpret the engineering story, you have a bird's eye view of Marble Canyon, and White-throated Swifts wheel below during breeding season.

Vermilion Cliffs — California Condor Release Site

What you'll see depends a lot on timing. If you're really lucky you may witness the release of condors bred and raised in captivity. For a few weeks following release the birds hang out on the cliffs while they become acclimated to life in the wild. While birds are "at home" Peregrine Fund staff
often station themselves under a shade ramada with their spotting scope trained towards the birds; the staff is a wealth of information. On a recent visit in September 2000 we joined them in watching two birds from the first release nearly five years ago. The young condor couple were practicing their courting behavior, a landmark occasion.

To find out where the birds have been seen recently, and to update yourself on recent events in the reintroduction saga, visit the excellent Peregrine Fund website, www.peregrinefund.org, and select “Notes from the Field.”

House Rock Valley, the release site, is also a good place to see species like Horned Lark, Vesper Sparrow, Say’s Phoebe, Mountain Bluebird, American Kestrel, Northern Harrier and Golden Eagle. Keep an eye out for pronghorn south of US 89A near the turnoff to House Rock Valley.

**Directions:** House Rock Valley marks the west end of the Vermillion Cliffs, a stunning geological feature north of the Grand Canyon. From the turnoff to Lees Ferry on US 89A just west of the Colorado River crossing at Navajo Bridge, go west 27.6 miles. Turn north on a graded gravel road, drive 2.8 miles, and park near the wooden shade structure (ramada) on the right side of the road. The actual release pens are at the top of the cliffs and not accessible to the public; best viewing is from the ramada using a spotting scope.

The Peregrine Fund and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service first released California Condors here in December 1996. Federal and state agencies and local lodge owners and ranchers have been willing cooperators. The young and inexperienced birds have been subject to every danger imaginable including run-ins with power lines, predation, shooting (only one incident to date, fortunately) and ingestion of lead shot. Peregrine Fund staff constantly monitor the birds, provide supplemental food and protect them where possible.

House Rock Valley was chosen as the first release site in Arizona for a variety of reasons. Canyon Country is good for condors. They soar above cliffs for long distances on thermal updrafts in search of carrion. The cliffs here are fairly accessible from both above and below, important for the rescue of young birds.