Specialties of the Region

Visitors to the Flagstaff area often ask about species to add to their life lists. The following “specialties” are charismatic, unexpected or uncommon locally, or restricted by range or habitat preference. Also see the checklist near the end of this book.

**Barrow’s Goldeneye** — Rare, but a dozen or more are usually present November through February along with the Common Goldeneye immediately below Glen Canyon Dam and on the first eight to ten miles of the Colorado River toward Lees Ferry. Usually decent scope views can be had from the observation deck at the base of the dam if you take the park service tour.

**California Condor** — The reintroduction program at the Vermilion Cliffs has had its highs and lows as one would expect. Check the website [www.peregrinefund.org](http://www.peregrinefund.org) for the latest in this Herculean effort. It is worthwhile to try for them at the Vermilion Cliffs. Grand Canyon Village is also a possibility, albeit less likely.

**Osprey** — They arrive from wintering grounds in early April. Several pairs have nested on Upper Lake Mary for a number of years. The nest snag at Mormon Lake on private property was recently felled after a lightning strike set it on fire. There are nesting pairs on the south Kaibab National Forest lakes also.

**Golden Eagle** — An hour or so from mid-morning on spent at the Mormon Lake Overlook will usually produce this species. In winter check power poles for perched eagles as well as Rough-legged and Ferruginous Hawks along US 89 from about four miles north of the Sunset Crater turnoff to Cameron. As of this writing there is a controversial request by members of a Hopi clan to collect eaglets on Wupatki National Monument for sacrifice in traditional religious ceremonies. For background see Ted Williams’ article, “Golden Eagles for the Gods,” in *Audubon* magazine April–May 2001.

**Bald Eagle** — A dozen or two, sometimes over 100, winter around Lake Mary and Mormon Lake December through February depending on weather, amount of open water and abundance of fish and waterfowl. They also feed on ungulate carcasses in the forest.

**Northern Goshawk** — Rare in widely scattered territories throughout the ponderosa forest, this species may have declined with the logging of old growth trees. It is the focus of much debate over forest management practices.
Zone-tailed Hawk — Typically they breed at lower elevations than the region covered by this book, but pairs have nested near Walnut Canyon National Monument, Oak Creek Canyon Vista, and probably near Grandview Point on the South Rim, Grand Canyon National Park.

Peregrine Falcon — Arizona has more Peregrine Falcons than any other state in the lower 48. Territories are concentrated along the Mogollon Rim and in the Grand Canyon. Good prospects for observing them are at Mormon Lake Overlook, Oak Creek Canyon Vista and during the fall Lipan Point hawk watch, Grand Canyon National Park.

Prairie Falcon — Most are seen in winter in this region, usually around Mormon Lake. Red Mountain and Walnut Canyon are places to be alert for the species April into the fall.

Flammulated Owl — Listen for this uncommon and local owl in mature stands of ponderosa with scattered snags and large oaks. Playing tapes is permissible but should not be used excessively. Strictly nocturnal, this neotropical migrant arrives late April to early May.

Mexican Spotted Owl — Breeding pairs are present in small numbers. Their preferred territories are on steeper slopes or shady canyons with mixed conifer or ponderosa and oak forests. Because of threatened status more specific information is not available.

Northern Pygmy Owl — This uncommon owl is difficult to find unless a male is calling April through June. Prefers mature stands of ponderosa with some Gambel oak with a mosaic of underbrush on moderate to steep slopes. Grand Canyon National Park, Oak Creek Canyon Vista and West Fork of Oak Creek are likely areas to search. They are also vocal in the fall and may readily respond to imitations of their call.

Magnificent Hummingbird — Well out of range according to field guides, these hummingbirds are rare but seen annually in this region. They have nested at least once near the Museum of Northern Arizona along the Rio de Flag and are reported annually at a few feeders. A few pairs almost certainly breed annually in the vicinity of the West Fork confluence with Oak Creek.

Broad-tailed Hummingbird — Very common, this is the only breeding hummingbird of the surrounding ponderosa forest. Listen for the distinctive trilling sound of the male generated by slots in the outer primary wing feathers. Rufous Hummingbirds arrive on their southbound migration about July 1st and compete fiercely for feeders and feeding territories with the Broad-taileds.
Three-toed Woodpecker — Uncommon and very local usually in tracts of recently burned forest, this species is easy to overlook. These woodpeckers have nested where the Hochderffer and Horseshoe Fires occurred in 1996.

Red-naped and Williamson’s Sapsuckers — Think aspen when looking for either species. Red-naped seems to be more common than Williamson’s. Both species migrate through Flagstaff. Hart Prairie Preserve and Lockett Meadow are good places to look, or anywhere on the San Francisco Peaks with good stands of mature aspen.

Lewis’s Woodpecker — Some years this is a surprisingly common but local breeder around Flagstaff April through October. Look among tall pine snags or partial snags (“spike-tops”) for characteristic flight pattern as they sally out for insects. East of Flagstaff Medical Center on North San Francisco Street and along West Forest Avenue on McMillan Mesa are likely areas, but development is a threat. Has been known to over-winter in Flagstaff during mild winters.

Olive-sided Flycatcher — This species is uncommon and declining. Try looking along Schultz Pass Road, around the Lockett Meadow area and up Snowbowl Road toward the ski lodge. Scan for calling males on tall snags. “Quick-threee-beers!”

Dusky Flycatcher — This is an uncommon summer resident in somewhat open montane areas usually with a moist drainage nearby. Hart Prairie Preserve has a small breeding population in the Bebb willow plant community. May also be seen in tamarisk thickets such as Rimmy Jim Tank and the seeps at Cameron in September.

Gray Flycatcher — Found in open sagebrush terrain or in mature, relatively open pinyon-juniper woodlands, but they are seldom very common. Red Mountain and the pinyon-juniper woodlands at the east entrance of Grand Canyon National Park and other similar habitats are good places to search.

Cassin’s and Western Kingbirds — Look for Cassin’s in open country with scattered trees including pinyon-juniper woodland. They are more common at higher elevations than Western Kingbird which nests at Cameron Trading Post and Lonely Dell at Lees Ferry.

Ash-throated Flycatcher — Small numbers of breeding pairs are present in pinyon-juniper woodlands. Listen for the police whistle-like call notes.
Cordilleran Flycatcher — Several breeding pairs can be reliably found at the Arboretum at Flagstaff May through August. Listen for the sibilant call notes in shady forested areas from the ponderosa forest to elevations as high as the mixed conifer and aspen forests. The Rio de Flag at the Museum of Northern Arizona, Lockett Meadow and the lower portion of the trail up to the Inner Basin are other good areas to search.

Tree Swallow — An uncommon to rare breeder in Arizona, they use nest boxes at Kachina Wetlands and the Arboretum at Flagstaff. Check mature aspen stands with suitable cavities near open water. The area opposite Double Springs Campground at Mormon Lake is another place to look.

Purple Martin — Our local population of Purple Martin uses nest cavities in large ponderosa pine snags. White Horse Lake and J. D. Dam in the south Kaibab National Forest, Walnut Canyon National Monument and the Great Blue Heron rookery at Mormon Lake are the best places to look.

Pinyon Jay — This highly social species is often seen in feeding flocks in and around the Continental subdivision in East Flagstaff, east of Sunset Crater and along US 89 north of the turn-off to Sunset Crater in the pinyon-juniper woodlands. Dr. Russ Balda of Northern Arizona University has studied the amazing memory ability of this seed caching species. Color-banded birds are subjects of his on-going research.

Clark's Nutcracker — A dozen or so are resident on O'Leary Peak and several hundred on the San Francisco Peaks, typically above 8000 feet elevation. Dr. Balda has studied their extraordinary spatial memory used in locating seeds cached months earlier.

Juniper Titmouse — This recently split species can usually be found without much difficulty in any tract of pinyon-juniper or pure juniper woodland. Walnut Canyon and the east (Desert View) entrance of Grand Canyon National Park are almost certain to yield this species with a little walking.

Northern Shrike — More individuals of this species are on the Colorado Plateau mid-November through February than generally known. Look for them on calm mornings on prominent perches along the highways, especially on the reservations. Most often perched on power poles along the railroad tracks, 34 have been recorded over the last 10 years on the 13 mile stretch of US 160 east of Tuba City between AZ 98 and AZ 564 (Navajo National Monument turnoff).
Gray Vireo — Usually found at lower elevations than in our region, they prefer slopes of open pinyon-juniper habitat with deciduous shrubs or small trees, typically Utah serviceberry or single-leaf ash. On AZ 64 from Cameron heading west to Grand Canyon National Park, drive about fourteen miles past several scenic views of the Little Colorado Gorge to mile marker 280. Turn left (south) onto the old highway which is drivable for the next three miles. Check any of the steep, wider ravines below Gray Mountain. Their song can carry remarkable distances in this beautiful setting.

Plumbeous Vireo — Another recent species split, they are common in the ponderosa forest where there are scattered Gambel oaks. Listen for the monotonous, questioning call as they forage languidly through the tree branches.

Lucy's Warbler — Our smallest wood-warbler is a riparian obligate and cavity nester. Given that, look for them at Lees Ferry and Oak Creek in the vicinity of West Fork and farther south.

Virginia's Warbler — This species is fairly common but local in montane scrub with Gambel oak and some herbaceous ground cover. Try Fat Man's Loop Trail just before or soon after the oaks leaf out, about May 15th. The parking area marked Mount Elden Trailhead is on the left about 5.2 miles east of City Hall on US 89, 0.4 mile past Flagstaff Mall Road. Also try the Oak Creek Canyon Vista looking down into the oaks.

Grace's Warbler — Found only in mature stands of ponderosa, they are difficult to locate except by song as they tend to stay high up. However, during migration in May at the Arboretum they can be seen fairly easily bathing in the small artificial stream in early morning.

Black-throated Gray Warbler — This warbler is found almost exclusively in pinyon-juniper woodland, especially where dominated by pinyon pine. Grand Canyon National Park near Desert View and Walnut Canyon National Monument are good places to start looking.

Red-faced Warbler — A ground nester, it prefers mixed pine-oak habitat with a grass and bracken fern substrate along drainages. Schultz Pass is a pretty sure bet when the males are singing. Also look for them in the vicinity of Cave Springs Campground on Oak Creek. They arrive in May and by August 1st most have departed for Mexico.

Painted Redstart — These are quite rare above the Mogollon Rim, but we had one coming to water in our back yard for a week in May 2000. They can be reliably found along Oak Creek in the area around Cave Springs Campground.
Olive Warbler — This species breeds very locally in this area, but almost nothing is known about the status. Reports of sightings would be appreciated. The locations described in the directions to Lockett Meadow and Schultz Pass Road are the most likely places to search. It is easily overlooked because it typically stays quite high in the ponderosa forest.

Hepatic Tanager — These tanagers are fairly common but somewhat elusive and very local in classic open, mature ponderosa forest. Their nests are typically quite high in tall ponderosa pines. The Oak Creek Canyon Vista and vicinity is probably as good a place as any to look for them.

Lazuli Bunting — A few pairs breed in the flood plain of the Rio de Flag near the Museum of Northern Arizona and in the inaccessible bottom of Walnut Canyon National Monument. When the fall migration starts, as early as mid-July, be alert for them in riparian areas and wetlands.

Black-throated Sparrow — This very pretty sparrow is best located in our area in the high desertscrub in Wupatki Basin a mile or so before reaching the monument’s Visitor Center along either side of Loop Road. Also check the blackbrush desertscrub along AZ 64 from Cameron to Desert View on the lower slopes of Gray Mountain. Look for singing males April through July.

Dark-eyed Junco — We list this common species because in certain years all six of the forms can be seen here. In the winter of 2000—2001 a number of the white-winged form were present. The local Red-backed form with the bi-colored bill is described well in The Sibley Guide to Birds. The Arboretum at Flagstaff has breeding pairs every year.

Scott's Oriole — This fairly common species has large territories and is therefore sparsely distributed in pinyon-juniper woodland. The best places to look are northeast of Sunset Crater along the Loop Road, the hike to Red Mountain, or other extensive very open tracts of this habitat type. A scope is helpful to spot a distant male singing from atop a pinyon pine or juniper.