The Arboretum at Flagstaff is at the southwest edge of Flagstaff off historic Route 66. Our suggested foray into the southern tip of the Kaibab explores just a small part of this vast and varied national forest: it straddles Grand Canyon National Park and continues almost to the Arizona–Utah state line. Both of these destinations provide examples of human–altered environments attractive to birds. Both include water, riparian habitat, ponderosa forest and grassland. Otherwise they are as different as can be, as you will see from the following descriptions.

The Arboretum at Flagstaff

If you have time for only one birding trip while visiting the Flagstaff area, this is the place to go for a sense of the climate, habitats, and bird species at this elevation on the Colorado Plateau. Sited at 7150 feet, the Arboretum at Flagstaff has a mission focused on understanding and appreciating the plants and plant communities of the Plateau through research, education, and conservation. It is close to town, has a sensational view of the San Francisco Peaks, and is an interesting and beautiful destination even if there were few birds.

Directions: From Flagstaff City Hall go south on Route 66/Milton Road 0.6 mile and right on Business 40/West Route 66 about 1.9 miles to Woody Mountain Road. Turn left on the asphalt road which soon changes to gravel. In 3.8 miles you will see a sign on the right for the Arboretum entrance. Call 928-774-1442 or view the website at www.thearb.org for fees and hours. Guided bird walks are scheduled at 7:30 A.M. most Saturdays May through July and in September. The Arboretum is open April 1 through December 15.
Climate

Flagstaff has a climate of extremes. In a typical year the temperature highs nudge the nineties; the lows are below zero. The day and night temperatures in a given 24 hours commonly vary by 30 degrees and a difference of 50 degrees is not unheard of. Temperatures vary from year to year too, with a joke among local gardeners that the frost-free growing season is ninety days, plus or minus ninety days.

Average precipitation is 21 inches a year, about half in late summer afternoon rains called monsoons. We get an average of about 100 inches of snow, but as little as 11 inches has been recorded and local residents still talk of the record 210 inches of 1972/73. Dry air and porous volcanic soils exaggerate the effects of low annual precipitation. Plants survive with little water. Animals often depend on man-made contrivances for their water. Yet the birds and wildlife adapt and flourish.

April through September is an excellent time to experience birds typical of the ponderosa pine forest and the high elevation dry grassland areas called “parks.” The small artificial pond and riparian area illustrate how important perennial water is in the Flagstaff area. Botanical plantings and irrigated grounds in juxtaposition with native habitats attract a good sample of resident species as well as neotropical migrants. The Arboretum checklist includes more than 100 species to date. About 40 species are thought to breed here.

The best times for migrants are May and September. Neotropical breeding species start arriving in late April. Cordilleran Flycatchers are among the last to arrive in late May. Nest boxes attract Western Bluebirds and several pairs of Tree Swallows. The latter species is an uncommon to rare breeder in Arizona because of its strong attraction to open water and need for suitable nest cavities, a combination very scarce in most of Arizona.

Species usually observed or heard May through July include Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird (July and August), Brewer’s Blackbird, the local form of Dark-eyed Junco (“Red-backed”), Barn, Cliff and Violet-green Swallows, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Chipping, Lark and Vesper Sparrows, Western Meadowlark, Plumbeous Vireo, Grace’s and Yellow-rumped Warblers, Western Tanager and Lesser Goldfinch. In 1999 a pair of Red-faced Warblers nested in a small grove of aspen and mixed conifers. Rarities on the checklist include Northern Waterthrush and Dickcissel. Sometimes in early morning pronghorn can be seen in the grassland.
Inquire at the Visitor Center reception desk about recent sightings and to obtain the latest checklist and map of the grounds. A guided bird walk is highly recommended for the first-time visitor. If on your own, the best birding is around the Visitor Center, courtyard, and small stream inlet to the pond where birds congregate to bathe and drink. A nature trail winds through the ponderosa pines. The irrigated botanical gardens of various types illustrate possibilities for landscaping to attract birds and butterflies on the Colorado Plateau.

**South Kaibab National Forest**

The south Kaibab National Forest has a number of lakes and wetlands. Some of the lakes are stocked for recreational fishing. Several breeding pairs of Osprey feed lavishly on hatchery-raised fish. Various ducks and shorebirds can be present in migration along with Eared and Pied-billed Grebes. Where suitable cavity nest sites are available close to water, Tree and Violet-green Swallows and Purple Martin can be found spring and summer. A number of Bald Eagles typically winter here.

Although heavily logged during the last 100 years the Kaibab National Forest still provides habitat for a good variety of forest birds. The area south of Williams has pockets of mature ponderosa pine which host several widely scattered Northern Goshawk territories. A good bit of Gambel oak is intermixed with the pines. Where healthy oaks are present the number and density of species is significantly greater than in pure pine stands. Studies have shown that oaks are very important to wildlife, including birds like Wild Turkey and neotropical breeding species such as Band-tailed Pigeon, Virginia's Warbler and Black-headed Grosbeak. Because the importance of this forest component was not fully appreciated, oaks suffered from neglect and abuse until recent years. Poaching for firewood has been a problem too. The Forest Service now preserves and protects these oaks as much as possible.

**Directions:** From the I-17 and I-40 interchange, go west toward Williams 17.5 miles to Exit 178. Turn left (south) onto FR 141, Garland Prairie Road. The pavement soon gives way to packed cinder. The suggested route is about 60 miles round trip from this point. Contact the Williams Ranger Station, 928-635-5600, for campground facilities, fees and road information in winter or wet weather. The best time to visit is weekdays May through September.

The road passes through typical ponderosa habitat for five or six miles and then through the grassland of Garland Prairie. Along the way scan for Log-
gerhead Shrike, Western Meadowlark, and Chipping, Lark and Vesper Sparrows. Red-tailed Hawk and American Kestrel are present year round, and in late fall to early winter Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks are possible.

When you reach the western edge of Garland Prairie turn right on FR 62 and scan for species typical of the pine forest. (This one-mile road is gated November 15 to April 15.) At the end of FR 62 park and check the trees and openings for Black-headed Grosbeak and nuthatches. And listen for Plumbeous Vireo, Western Wood-Pewee, and Cordilleran Flycatcher — often difficult to locate using visual cues alone.

Walk the quarter mile to Scholz Lake, a favorite of Elaine Morrall, a Northern Arizona Audubon Society member who contributed to this destination. This lake is managed for wildlife use, not for recreation. Check the oak clumps along the damp drainage below the dam. This area is birdy, especially when the oaks are leafing out in mid-May or for the next several months. Cross the dam and walk left toward the far end of the lake. The far end is closed during nesting season, but from about a quarter mile beyond the dam you can see many Double-crested Cormorant and Great Blue Heron nests. A spotting scope is helpful. Return to your car and drive back to FR 141.

Turn right on FR 141, drive about 1.5 miles then turn left on FR 109. About 2.5 miles after the turn you will see a sign on the left and parking at the trailhead for the Overland Road Historic Trail and Sycamore Rim Trail. Follow the signs for Sycamore Rim Trail for about 0.4 mile. When the main trail turns right, go straight and downhill to Pomeroy Tanks, a string of natural reservoirs interspersed with patches of wet grasses and wildflowers. The well-eroded basalt canyon walls are patchy with lichen. And you can see plenty of birds on an early morning visit. Look for Northern Flicker, Western Wood-Pewee, and Plumbeous Vireo. Various warblers and the Western Tanager may come to drink and even possibly the uncommon Hepatic Tanager.

Return to your car and drive about 3 more miles to White Horse Lake. Turn left into the recreation area and take the first left. Follow this to the end and park in the lot at the day use area. Walk down the boat ramp to the water's edge to scan for ducks and waders. The grassy ridge you see on your left is the dam. Walk up on the dam and scan the farther half of the lake then turn to check the drainage below the dam. A colony of Purple Martins nests nearby and in the summer you are likely to see a number of these birds, uncommon in the West, hawking for insects. Check for woodland birds and other swallows.
Leaving the lake, turn left on FR 109. After a mile turn left again onto FR 12. The forest on either side of FR 12 is especially rich with uneven-aged pines and large Gambel oaks. A stop after about one mile is likely to reward your patience with forest birds and other wildlife. Look and listen keenly for Band-tailed Pigeon, Acorn Woodpecker and Northern Pygmy Owl. This is among the better areas to listen and look for erratic flocks of Red Crossbills. Continue driving to the “T” intersection, turn right on FR 105, and drive the short distance to J. D. Dam. This lake has birds similar to White Horse Lake, but since it is smaller and more remote you may see additional species. The cattails and reeds are breeding grounds for Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds.

When you drive back the short distance to the “T” intersection, go straight through to the end, 4.5 miles, to visit Sycamore Point. This is the best overlook for the vast Sycamore Canyon Wilderness Area. And you thought the Grand Canyon was gorgeous! Look especially for Wild Turkey in this remote area.

When you’re ready to go back return to the “T” intersection. Turn right on FR 12 and retrace your route, reluctantly, to civilization.