

MADERA CANYON BIRDS: SPRING 2020 – MARCH 1 TO MAY 31

This season begins with the country and the world experiencing an unprecedented situation. An outbreak Coronavirus Covid-19 has spread from China across the world and to the United States & Arizona. At the time of this writing there are many suggestions on human behavior to help restrict or slow the spread of this disease. While birding and nature viewing are generally considered healthy and safe activities, some precautions should be taken during these times. First and foremost is to avoid gathering in close proximity to other humans. Car pooling to birding locations is discouraged, birding fieldtrips (and many other events) have been cancelled, places where people gather to view birds are being closed, and other places are voluntarily limiting the number of people in one place. At this point it is unknown whether the Forest Service will enact restrictions in the Madera Canyon Recreation Area. How should we adjust our behaviors as birders and visitors to Madera Canyon?

Avoid gatherings. Should there be crowds at the feeding stations think about coming back later and if you are at the feeding stations limit your time as to give others a chance to safely view the birds. Should you find the crowd of people observing the Elegant Trogon, try to find the bird from a distance or another vantage point. Should you find the trogon yourself; yes let others know and then move away as to give them a safe opportunity to view this beautiful creature.

Avoid direct human-to-human contact. Shaking hands and hugging are out. "High-fives" after finding the Elegant Trogon or the season's first Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher is out.

Wash your hands. Should you touch railings, chairs, benches, door handles, anything in the restrooms - wash your hands with soap & water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

A modified form of the Madera Canyon Birds follows. The format of this report has changed such that "specialty" species are discussed rather than generally all birds.

A complete checklist of Madera Canyon birds is available for download on the FOMC web site: www.friendsofmaderacanyon.org and in print at the Visitor Information Station as you enter the canyon and in brochure boxes attached to trail map panels in the canyon. To learn what unusual species are being seen in the canyon and in southeast Arizona generally, go to the local birding hotline on the web at: <http://birding.aba.org/maillist/AZ>.

Summary: The past winter was particularly wet with moisture falling from early through late winter though there is very little snow remaining at higher elevations. Madera Creek is flowing well for its entire length in Madera Canyon and some of the side drainages are flowing as well. Springtime in southeast Arizona is usually dry and can become quite warm by May.

Elegant Trogon – Two male Elegant Trogons have remained in Madera Canyon this past winter. One (occasionally both) could be found frequenting the *Pyracantha* bush immediately below the Madera Picnic Area. These birds are likely to move up higher in the canyon by April and will be joined by migrants that wintered elsewhere, likely Mexico. These birds will begin carving out territories along the main drainages and many of the side drainages throughout Madera Canyon from the Madera Picnic Area and higher. The females of the species arrive a little later in April and begin pairing up with the male that has the just right territory and nest cavity. The easiest accessible place to look and listen for Elegant Trogons during the breeding season is along the Nature Trail behind the Santa Rita Lodge from the Madera Picnic Area to & above the Amphitheater area. Often a male can be heard barking and occasionally seen while sitting in front of the feeders at the Santa Rita Lodge. Otherwise pairs can be found near Madera Kubo, Chuparosa B&B, from the Mt. Wrightson Picnic Area up the Carrie Nation Trail, Old Baldy Trail, and the lower portion of the Super Trail, also along the Dutch John Spring Trail, at Bog Spring, Kent Spring, a few unnamed minor drainages.

Hummingbirds – This Canyon is one of the best places to observe hummingbirds north of the border. The best spots in the canyon for observations are three feeding stations at the Santa Rita Lodge, Madera Kubo, and Chuparosa B&B as well as at any patch of flowering plants, such as the Desert Honeysuckle along the Proctor Road area loop trail. The spring hummingbird migration is primarily from March through April with smaller numbers through May. Broad-billed & Black-chinned Hummingbirds return to breed, are the most numerous, and can be found anywhere in the canyon. Costa's Hummingbirds breed at the base of the canyon in desert-type habitats and only rarely venture up into the canyon. The few Anna's and Rivoli's Hummingbirds overwintered at the feeding stations and become more numerous and spread throughout the canyon to breeding during the springtime. Most Broad-tailed and all Rufous & Calliope Hummingbirds are migrants moving through to more northern mountains. Any other species of hummingbirds are uncommon to rare and should be documented & reported.

Montezuma Quail – This species is resident in Madera Canyon though it is infrequently seen. Montezuma Quail occur from the lowest part of the canyon, the Proctor Road area, all the way into the pine-oak woodlands above 6000ft elevation. They have a habit of freezing & remaining very still when approached, and then if the intruder gets close enough they flush from under foot. Sometimes they freeze out in the open, such as on the road or at the edge of a trail. At these times the observer can get long and very satisfying looks. The best place/time to look for this species is where/when human activity is low though they have shown up at water features at the Lodge, Kubo, and Chuparosa. Perhaps the best method of looking for Montezuma Quail is the not look for them; just happen upon them while enjoying a walk or a hike.

Raptors – Roughly ten species of diurnal raptors may be found in Madera Canyon the spring season, three really grab the attention of visiting birders: Northern Goshawk, Gray Hawk, and Zone-tailed Hawk. One (maybe two) pair of resident Northern Goshawks breeds in the higher elevations and sparsely traveled portions of Madera Canyon. On rare occasions one may soar down canyon or high over the surrounding ridges. At least one pair of Gray Hawks have been breeding in lower Madera Canyon for the past several and are frequently heard calling and seen soaring. A few pair of Zone-tailed Hawks nest nearby and can often be seen soaring over the canyon particularly hunting the slopes of the canyon between Proctor Road and the Whitehouse Picnic Area. Gray and Zone-tailed Hawks typically arrive in late March.

Owls and Nightjars – Eight species of owls and four species of nightjars can be found in and around Madera Canyon. Now is a good time to listen for Great Horned, Western and Whiskered Screech-Owls, and Northern Pygmy-Owls. They are in the canyon but are very hard to find except when they are calling. Elf Owls arrive in late March and several pairs usually nest from Whitehouse Picnic Area up to the Mt. Wrightson parking area. A few Spotted and Flammulated Owls are in the forests in the upper canyon but are very hard to locate. Barn Owls may be encountered between dusk and dawn along less traveled roads in the desert below the Canyon. Please do not play audio recording to attract owls as they are busy defending territories from natural intruders and feeding young.

By April Lesser Nighthawks may be seen between dusk and dawn along Madera Canyon Road. Common Poorwill can be heard in the evenings around Proctor Road and lower portions of the Canyon. Mexican Whip-poor-wills can be heard from the Amphitheater parking area and up the Canyon.

Woodpeckers – There are several species of woodpeckers that reside in Madera Canyon. The two that attract the most attention are the Acorn and Arizona Woodpeckers. The Acorn Woodpecker attracts attention because of its abundance and behaviors. These can be found at any of the feeding stations in the canyon and along most of the trails, they are quite obvious and rather flamboyant. The Arizona Woodpecker, on the other hand, is rather shy. Normally seen singly or as a pair, this species can be found throughout the canyon wherever there are oaks. The best place to observe this species is at the feeding stations as it sneaks in to get some suet before being chased away by the Acorn Woodpeckers.

Flycatchers - Eighteen species of flycatchers have been recorded for the canyon and all are here in spring. Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers arrive in mid-May and can be found along all of the drainages (wherever there's Sycamores) in Madera Canyon. Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet may be found around Proctor and the Whitehouse Picnic Area. While Western Wood-Pewees can be found nearly everywhere in the canyon, it's large cousin, the Greater Pewee is found at higher elevations where the pines begin to mix with the oaks. Cordilleran Flycatchers are found mostly in shaded areas along creeks from the Amphitheater area and higher in the canyon after late April. Hammond's, Dusky, Gray, & Pacific Slope Flycatchers are migrating through May. Dusky-capped & Brown-Crested Flycatchers return in April to breed in cavities throughout the canyon.

Black-capped Gnatcatchers are resident breeders in the lowest portion of Madera Canyon and along the flanks of the Santa Rita Mountains. In the canyon they are found along the Proctor Loop Trail and down Madera Creek to the west. They often build nests in close proximity to the trail and maybe viewed without encroaching. Both Blue-gray & Black-tailed Gnatcatchers are nearby so careful observations are necessary to determine which species you are looking at.

Thirty-four species of warblers have been documented in Madera Canyon over the years. Regularly occurring migrant warblers include: Orange-crowned, Nashville, Townsend's, Hermit, Wilson's, MacGillivray's, and Yellow-rumped Warblers. The breeding species include: Virginia's (uncommon high elevation), Lucy's (common Proctor area), Yellow (rare), Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Gray, Grace's, Red-faced, and Olive Warbler along with Painted Redstart.

The following is a quick list of interesting though not as highly sought after species for Madera Canyon: Mexican Jays may be found in flocks throughout the Canyon. Bridled Titmice can be found throughout the canyon in breeding pairs mostly above the Whitehouse Picnic Area. Verdins are noisy permanent residents found in the mesquite grassland around Proctor. Eastern Bluebirds are or were rare residents in the juniper-oak habitats and may breed near the Bog Springs Campground, sightings should be documented. Crissal Thrashers can sometimes be found in the mesquites along Proctor Road. Phainopeplas are common in the mesquite grassland all year where they feed on mistletoe berries. Hepatic Tanagers numbers will be increasing and pairs can be found throughout the canyon. Varied Bunting can be found in the mesquite grasslands below Madera Canyon up to Proctor and at the feeding stations. Botteri's and Cassin's Sparrow will be returning to the grasslands below the canyon but will be mostly silent & difficult to find until June. Yellow-eyed Juncos are still at feeders from Santa Rita Lodge to the Chuparosa Inn though most move to higher elevations to breed. Dark-eyed Juncos will migrate north by the end of April. Eastern (Lilian's) Meadowlark is common in the grasslands.

If you see an unusual bird - or one not on this or the canyon check list – please let us know by sending an email to: info@friendsofmaderacanyon.org. To view or print a copy of the Madera Canyon Bird Checklist, sign on to: www.friendsofmaderacanyon.org and go to 'Resources'.

For the Friends of Madera Canyon,
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