

## SOME BIRDS YOU MAY SEE AROUND TUCSON AREA GARDENS

**Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*):** Plump, ground-dwelling birds with plumed topknots. During the winter they form large groups, or coveys. Members of the covey maintain contact with one another through a series of clucking, crowing calls. In spring, males perch high in shrubs or trees and give clear descending calls to attract females. They nest on the ground, and the female may lay as many as a dozen eggs. The young leave the nest almost immediately and begin learning life skills by following their parents around. Attrition is quite high among young birds; a mated pair may end up with only three or four young from the original brood (survival of the fittest).



**White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*):** Grayish brown birds with large white wing patches. An area of blue skin surrounds its ruby red eyes. These large doves are spring/summer residents. Some individuals remain north of the Mexican border for the winter months, but most move south in September, returning in March. Many visit large flowers, apparently for nectar, and are recognized as important pollinators of saguaros.

**Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*):** Very common, widespread throughout North America. Named for their mournful call, these small-headed doves are gray-brown in color and have pointed tails tipped with white. They are prolific nesters and may bring off 4-6 broods per season in some parts of the Southwest. They are not the best architects in the world; their nest is a flimsy platform of sticks that they generally use over and over during the same season. The nests look like they could barely hold eggs, let alone young birds.



**Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*):** Small gray doves with a scaly appearance. When they take off, they flash bright chestnut in the wings and white edges to the tail. Primarily urban residents, they are rarely seen away from civilization---there are hundreds at the Reid Park Zoo and few, if any, in Saguaro National Park. They have a two-syllable call note that sounds like *no hope, no hope*. Sensitive to the cold, they often roost together as a group. They forage almost entirely on the ground and feed on grains, weed and grass seeds.

**Greater Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*):** A featured subject of cartoons and folklore, these curious-looking members of the cuckoo family are streaky brown with long tails and shaggy crests. They typically walk or run on the ground. Roadrunners feed on a variety of snakes, lizards, spiders, scorpions, birds, eggs, rodents, bats, and insects. Larger prey are grasped in the bird's bill and then killed as the bird strikes it against a rock, stick, or the ground.



**Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*):** Named for the male which has a black chin or throat. In certain lights, the throat shows an iridescent purple border. Arrives in the Southwest in spring to breed. Common in Tucson area gardens and at hummingbird feeders. Flips its tails a lot while feeding. Spends the winter in Mexico. Feeds on nectar as well as on small insects.

**Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*):** The most common winter hummingbird; some remain during the spring and summer. The male has a bright rose-red crown and throat and is more vocal than most hummingbirds. The rather unmelodic song is a series of repetitive scratchy notes, often delivered while perched. The male frequently moves his head back and forth as he sings. There is no such thing as a pair bond in hummingbirds. After a lot of courting, males and females get together for about a minute and a half, and then the male goes off hoping to be married again. The female does all of the nest building, incubating of the eggs, and tending the young. Anna's hummingbirds sometimes nest as early as January in Tucson.





**Costa's Hummingbird (*Calypte costae*):** Smaller than Black-chinned or Anna's. Both sexes make a dry *tic* call note. Males have green backs, iridescent violet crowns and a flared violet throat patch. Males perform daring courtship displays, rising high in the air, often 100 feet or more, then plunging downward while making a shrill, continuous whistle.

**Gila Woodpecker (*Melanerpes uropygialis*):** Noisy, cheeky birds with plain brown heads and underparts, and black and white barred backs. The males have rounded red caps on the top of their heads. Omnivores, they eat almost anything that presents itself. They can be a bit of a nuisance at hummingbird feeders, siphoning off large quantities of sugar water. During breeding season they often drum on metal objects such as coolers and drain pipes as a way of advertising their territories. Gilas frequently make their nesting cavities in saguaro cactus. They have a rather nagging call note, often delivered in flight.



**Verdin (*Auriparus flaviceps*):** Tiny, active birds of hot desert regions. Verdins appear rather nondescript at first glance--brown-gray overall--but the adults (both male and female) have yellowish heads. They also have small chestnut-colored shoulder patches. Verdins feed on insects and their larvae, small fruits and berries, and also visit flowers to sip nectar. Their nests are the size of a large softball, spherical in shape with a hollow center and an entrance on the side. They use nests for raising their young as well as for sleeping in at night.

**Cactus Wren (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*):** Large, sociable wrens; the state bird of Arizona. Cactus wrens build massive bulky nests with an opening at one end. In areas of human habitation, they often use paper products such as tissue or wax paper as nesting material. Males may build extra dummy nests while the female is incubating, and after the breeding season, they may sleep in these nests at night. Their voice is a harsh *chug, chug, chug* that gains in rapidity and sounds a bit like a car engine trying to start. Cactus wrens feed mostly on insects and also some fruits.



**Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*):** Slim, long-tailed members of the mimic thrush family with impressive voices. Mockingbirds mimic the songs of other birds as well as a host of other non-avian and mechanical sounds. Their repertoire may contain more than 150 distinct song types and these change during the course of the bird's lifetime. Males sing to defend territory and to attract mates (often in the middle of the night). Mockingbirds consume insects as well as fruits.

**Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*):** Almost uniformly brown with yellow-orange eyes and a downward curving bill. Thrashers spend a lot of time on the ground, sweeping their heavy bills from side to side in soil or leaf litter, searching for grubs and insects. They are remarkably specialized in their choice of nesting sites, almost always selecting cholla cactus. They are in the same family as mockingbirds and are great songsters as well, though their repertoire includes fewer imitations.



**European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*):** Common in cities, parks, and fields and not native to North America. Some short-sighted person thought it would be nice to bring all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare to North America; starling was one of them. Gregarious in nature, they often flock together in large groups and are regarded as a nuisance. They nest in cavities and often use old woodpecker holes in saguaro cactus. They may also displace other cavity-nesting birds. In the spring starlings have an iridescent appearance; in winter they are heavily speckled.

**Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*):** Appears on more Christmas cards than any other North American bird! Male are brilliant red all over with black faces, large pinkish-orange bills and pointed crests. Their heavy bills are adapted for extracting seeds from plants and flowers by cutting or crushing the shells. They also eat insects and berries. Their musical, whistled song sounds like *what cheer what cheer cheer*. This is the same species that occurs in eastern North America, and many people are surprised to see them here—a testimony to the diversity of the Sonoran Desert.





**Pyrrhuloxia (*Cardinalis sinuatus*):** Males are gray, washed with red, and both sexes have wispy crests. Their bills are stubby and yellow and are shaped more like those of parrots in contrast to the pink, triangular bill of the cardinal. Tolerate drier and more open habitat than cardinals. Feed on beetles, caterpillars, grasshoppers, seeds, fruit, and berries.

**House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*):** Originally native to the Southwest, but now common throughout North America. House finches are streaky brown, and males are decorated with accents of red. Social birds with cheery songs, they are usually found in small groups. They feed on seeds, fruit, flower buds (they love to pick off penstemon flowers just as they are about to open), insects, and often visit hummingbird feeders for sugar water.



**Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*):** Small, sociable birds that feed primarily on seeds. They are particularly fond of the seeds of sunflowers and *Gaillardia*. They are quite acrobatic and sometimes hang upside down to reach into a seed head. Males have bright yellow underparts, black caps, and greenish or black backs. Males have been found to mimic the songs of other birds. Goldfinches have an undulating flight pattern, dipping up and down as they fly.

**House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*):** Another Shakespearean introduction; not native to North America, but now common and widespread. House sparrows are city birds, rarely found in wilderness areas. Males have black throats, white cheeks and a chestnut-colored nape. Female and young lack the black throat and are rather dingy looking. Often nest in old woodpecker holes in saguaro cactus.



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