

Arizona Wildlife Raptors



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RAPTORS OF ARIZONA

The raptors included in this booklet represent only a sample of the 42 species found in Arizona. Those included were chosen because they represent species most often seen and are of general public or management interest. For additional information about bird watching and the species found in Arizona see:

- *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, by National Geographic Society
- *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, by David Allen Sibley
- *A Guide to Bird Watching*, by Joseph Hickey
- *The Birds of Arizona*, by Allan Phillips, Joe Marshall and Gale Monson
- *Birds of North America: a guide to field identification*, by Chandler Robins, Bertel Brunn and Herbert Zim
- *A Field Guide to Western Birds*, by Roger Tory Peterson

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RAPTOR IDENTIFICATION

The raptors in Arizona can be divided into several groups based on size, feather characteristics, and silhouette. It is important to realize that by the time a young raptor is able to fly, it is the same size as its parents. The silhouettes given below should make it easier for you to identify a given hawk, eagle, or owl. Look in the upper right-hand corner of each page for the group silhouette of the *raptor** described.



Buteos - Medium to large size soaring hawks having broad wings and short tails. They are largely rodent eaters.



Accipiters - Medium to small bird-eating hawks with short, rounded wings and long tails. They are strong fliers.



Falcons - Medium to small raptors with pointed wings and long, slender tails. Very fast fliers. They eat birds, insects and mammals.



Eagles - Very large soaring raptors with broad wings and short, broad tails.



Harriers - Medium-sized hawks with long wings and tail. Low-flying *rodent* eaters.



Vultures - Large, broad-winged, scavengers with naked heads.

* Italicized words are defined on the last two pages of this booklet.

TURKEY VULTURE: *Carthartes aura*

Spanish name: Aura

Description: Dark gray-brown or black except for the paler gray undersides of the flight feathers. Wingspan is nearly 6 feet. Tail is quite long. Adults have bare, red heads; the heads of the young are black.



Range: Statewide during summer; southern Arizona during winter.

Habitat: Prefer lower deserts, but found statewide.

Niche: Primarily *scavengers*. Feeding vultures attract other birds from great distances.

Life History: Nest on exposed ledges, in caves or tree hollows, and in thickets or hollow logs. Nest height is up to 20' above ground. Normally lay 2 dull white eggs blotched with brown. Young hatch in 38 to 41 days. First flight takes place 66 to 88 days after hatching.

Comments: Turkey Vultures hold their wings in a distinctive "V" shape when soaring. Vultures play an important role in the environment by eating decaying animal matter, which helps prevent the spread of disease. Turkey Vultures, unlike most other birds, have an acute sense of smell and often locate their meals by smell.



CALIFORNIA CONDOR: *Gymnogyps californianus*

Spanish name: Cóndor

Description: Very large, black bird. Adults have orange head with white wing-pits.

Juveniles dull gray with mottled white wing-pits. Wingspan is up to 108 inches. In flight, wings held flat. Weigh about 23 pounds and can soar at 15,000 feet above the ground.

Range: Limited to reintroduction sites at the Vermillion Cliffs and Grand Canyon.

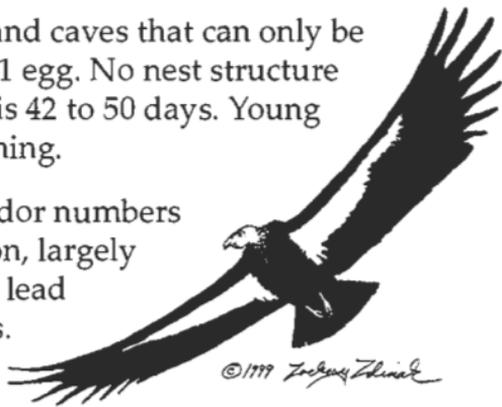
Habitat: Arid foothills and mountains, and steep canyon walls.

Niche: Eats *carrion* almost exclusively.

Life History: Uses cliffs and caves that can only be accessed by flight, to lay 1 egg. No nest structure is built. *Incubation period* is 42 to 50 days. Young *fledge* 180 days after hatching.

Comments: By 1982, condor numbers declined to near extinction, largely from habitat destruction, lead poisoning, and pesticides.

Intensive captive breeding programs are in place to reestablish wild populations. The California Condor was reintroduced in Arizona in 1996. This species is federally listed as endangered and is included in the Arizona Game and Fish Department's listing of Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona.



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GOLDEN EAGLE: *Aquila chrysaetos*

Spanish name: Aguila real



Description: Adults solid dark brown, with some feathers on the back of the neck that appear golden. Wingspan is 80 to 88 inches. Young are brown with white patches at base of primary feathers. Tail has a lot of white at the base, and is dark towards the tip.

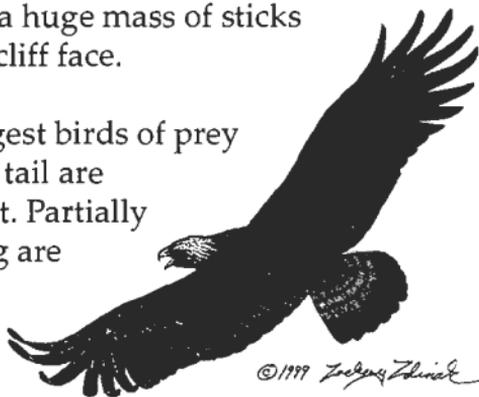
Range: In mountains and canyons statewide. Eagles from more northerly states *migrate* into northern Arizona in winter.

Habitat: Mountain canyons and foothills.

Niche: A *diurnal* predator, the Golden Eagle preys mainly on rabbits and *rodents*.

Life History: Lay 1 to 4 white eggs spotted with brown. *Incubation period* is 43 to 45 days. Young *fledge* in 66 to 75 days. Nest is usually a huge mass of sticks located 10 to 100 feet up a cliff face.

Comments: One of the largest birds of prey in Arizona. Long neck and tail are distinctive features in flight. Partially white feathers of the young are valued by various Native American cultures for use in ceremonies.



BALD EAGLE: *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

Spanish name: Aguila cabeza blanca

Description: White head and tail, dark brown body. Average wingspan is 70 to 90 inches. Young are brown with some white under the wings. White head and tail feathers do not appear until the eagle is 4 to 5 years old.



Range: Northwestern and eastern-central Arizona. Nests concentrated along the Salt and Verde rivers, as well as along other major lakes and rivers statewide. Can be found at most major *riparian* areas statewide.

Habitat: Usually seen near forest-bordered lakes and streams in mountainous areas, but some pairs nest in desert settings along the Salt and Verde Rivers.

Niche: Fish are the usual prey, but waterfowl, wading birds, coots, rabbits and *carrion* are also eaten.

Life History: Generally 1 to 3, white eggs are laid, which hatch in approximately 35 days. Young *fledge* in 70 to 98 days. Nest is a bulky platform of sticks, located on top of a butte, rock chimney, cliff ledge, or in a large tree. Tree nests are 30 to 60 feet above ground. Cliff nests are 10 to 180+ feet above ground.

Comments: Young Bald Eagles are often mistaken for Golden Eagles. During courtship eagles lock talons in the air and fall toward the ground. The Bald Eagle is listed as threatened on the Federal Endangered Species list, and is included in the Arizona Game and Fish Department's listing of Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona.



NORTHERN HARRIER: *Circus cyaneus*

Spanish name: Gavilan ratonero



Description: Slim hawk with long wings, tail, and legs. Male and female *plumages* differ dramatically. Male is light gray with gray-speckled white underparts. Female is dark brown with brown-streaked, white underparts. Juveniles similar to females, with cinnamon bodies. Both have banded tails with a darker band across the end and a conspicuous, white rump patch. Wingspan ranges from 38 to 48 inches.

Range: A winter *migrant* statewide, found in farming areas in southern and western Arizona. May nest irregularly in northeastern Arizona.

Habitat: Usually found around grasslands, fields and marshes.

Niche: A *diurnal* predator, eats primarily *rodents* and small birds.

Life History: Usually lay 5 eggs, but have been documented to lay up to 9. Eggs hatch in 31 to 32 days. Young *fledge* in 30 to 35 days.

Northern Harriers nest on or near the ground, in flimsy nests made of weed stalks and grasses.



Comments: At close range, the Northern Harrier has an owl-like facial disk, which aids in hearing. It flies low over the ground tilting from side to side. Wings are held in a shallow "V." The Northern Harrier was previously known as the Marsh Hawk.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK: *Accipiter striatus*

Spanish name: Esmerejon coludo



Description: Male is about the size of a Mourning Dove. Female is larger. Adult's back, tail and wings are blue-gray. Tail is long and is distinctly notched or squared. Face and throat are white and the eye is scarlet with a white stripe above. Undersides are white with fine, red brown horizontal barring. Juveniles are brown backed with vertical reddish brown streaking. Wings are short and rounded; wingspan is 20 to 28 inches.

Range: Throughout Arizona during winter *migrations*, eastern and northern mountains in summer.

Habitat: Prefer forested mountains and wooded stream bottoms with dense brushy areas.

Niche: A *diurnal* predator, feeds mainly on small birds.

Life History: Lay 4 to 5 brown-blotched white eggs. *Incubation period* is 32 to 35 days. Young *fledge* 24 to 27 days after hatching. Nest is a platform of twigs and sticks, usually 10 to 60 feet above ground in a pine or fir tree.

Comments: Often confused with the Cooper's Hawk, since size and coloration are similar. The Sharp-shinned Hawk's smaller body, smaller, more square-shaped head in relation to its body, and squared tail are the main identification keys.



COOPER'S HAWK: *Accipiter cooperii*

Spanish name: Esmerejon de Cooper



Description: A crow-sized hawk. Adult has a blue-gray back and reddish underparts horizontally barred with white. Black crown. Tail is long and rounded. Juveniles have a brown head and back, with reddish vertical streaking on otherwise white breast and belly. Wingspan is relatively short, about 29 to 37 inches.

Range: Common statewide except in western desert sections of the state and in highest mountains.

Habitat: Prefers mixed woodlands and canyons.

Niche: A *diurnal* predator, preys mainly on small birds and small mammals.

Life History: Lay 4 to 5 white eggs, occasionally spotted with brown. *Incubation period* is 32 to 36 days and the young *fledge* from 27 to 34 days of age. Nest is a platform of sticks lined with bark, usually 35 to 45 feet high in a sycamore, alder or cottonwood tree.

Comments: A fast, powerful hawk with a call similar to the Flicker. Often confused with the Sharp-shinned Hawk. (The Sharp-Shinned Hawk has a square or notched tail, is generally smaller, and has a smaller head in comparison to its body.) As with most raptors, the female is larger than the male. Thus, male Cooper's Hawks are about the same size as female Sharp-shinned Hawks.



Cindy Tanner

NORTHERN GOSHAWK: *Accipiter gentilis*

Spanish name: Gavilan pollero



Description: Adults are slate-gray above; underparts are white with fine gray barring. Tail has broad, dark gray bars, a narrow white tip and white undertail *coverts*. The face is white with a dark cap and white eye-line. Juveniles are brown backed, with dense streaking on underparts. White eye-line is present but less obvious than on the adults. Wingspan is 40 to 46 inches.

Range: Eastern and central mountain ranges, the Kaibab Plateau, and in the Chiricahua Mountains of S.E. Arizona.

Habitat: *Coniferous* forests, particularly spruce/fir forests and *riparian* areas with mixed broadleaf deciduous forests.

Niche: A diurnal predator that preys mainly on birds including Pigeons, Doves, and small ducks. Also takes small mammals, including tree squirrels and rabbits.

Life History: Lay 3 to 4 whitish eggs, which hatch in 36 to 38 days. Young are ready to fly 35 to 42 days after hatching. Nest is located 20 to 60 feet high, built of sticks, and lined with bark and fresh evergreen branches.

Comments: The largest and most powerful of the bird-hunting hawks.

Somewhat shy, but can be quite aggressive near nests.

The Northern Goshawk is included in the Arizona Game and Fish Department's listing of Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona.



GRAY HAWK: *Buteo nitidus*

Spanish name: Gavilan gris



Description: Adult has a gray back, gray and whitish barred underparts and a whitish rump. Tail is white with black bands. Young are brown with brown-streaked underparts and a narrowly banded tail. Average wingspan is 35 inches.

Range: Summer resident primarily of the Santa Cruz and San Pedro River drainages, and possibly other major streams in southern Arizona.

Habitat: Seldom found far from major river channels, seems to require cottonwood and willow stands for nesting.

Niche: A *diurnal* predator, main food is large lizards. Small birds and *rodents* complete its diet.

Life History: Breeding season lasts from April through August. Usually lay 2 white eggs. *Incubation period* is unknown, but estimated at 32 days with *fledging* at 30 days. Nests are generally 40 to 60 feet up in a cottonwood tree.

Comments: Sometimes referred to as the Mexican Goshawk. It is a *buteo*, however, and not related to the Goshawk, which is an *accipiter*. The Gray Hawk is an uncommon bird in the U.S., and is included in the Arizona Game and Fish Department's listing of Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona.



RED-TAILED HAWK: *Buteo jamaicensis*



Spanish name: Aguililla parda

Description: A heavy buteo, with a variety of color phases. Adults are typically dark brown above, and the breast may be light with a darker belly band or uniformly dark. Tail is red above and whitish or pinkish below with a narrow, dark band at the tip. Tips of the wings are black, contrasting with the light bases. Wingspan is about 50 inches. Young have gray tails banded with brown.

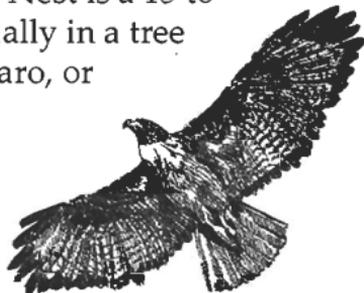
Range: Statewide.

Habitat: Mountains, deserts and open country - almost anywhere, except highest peaks.

Niche: A *diurnal* predator, preying mainly on *rodents* and rabbits but occasionally on small birds and reptiles.

Life History: Breeding season begins in late February. Usually lay 2 to 3 spotted eggs, which hatch in 30 to 35 days and *fledge* in 45 to 46 days. Nest is a 15 to 70 foot high platform of sticks, usually in a tree in a wooded area, on top of a saguaro, or on a power line pole.

Comments: Red-tailed Hawks are often seen sitting on telephone poles. They have the widest variation in *plumage* and are the most commonly seen buteo in Arizona.



D McAllister

SWAINSON'S HAWK: *Buteo swainsoni*

Spanish Name: Aguillilla de Swainson



Description: Dark head, back and breast with contrasting white or buffy chin. Belly and wing linings are typically white or pale buff and the wing tips are dark. Tail is long, gray above and finely barred below with a dark band at the end. A rarer, dark form occurs which is all black except for the face and the barred tail. Wingspan is 52 inches. Young are brown with streaked underparts.

Range: Central and eastern Arizona.

Habitat: One of the most common large hawks seen in open grassland areas, but it is not a desert hawk.

Niche: A *diurnal* predator, feeds mainly on rats, gophers, and grasshoppers.

Life History: Lay 2 to 3 spotted eggs. *Incubation period* is 28 to 35 days and the young *fledge* in 35 days. Usually nests low, in mesquite trees or yuccas.



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COMMON BLACK HAWK: *Buteogallus anthracinus*

Spanish name: Aguililla cangrejera



Description: Large, dark hawk that looks somewhat like a Black Vulture. Has distinctly yellow legs, which often hang down in flight. There is one distinct band on the tail and faint white patches on the base of the outer *primary feathers*. Wingspan is about 50 inches.

Range: Uncommon resident of the state, but found along streams and rivers almost statewide.

Habitat: Closely associated with streamside *riparian* habitats and wooded canyons throughout the state.

Niche: *Diurnal* hunter that mainly feeds on lizards and aquatic animals and occasionally on small mammals.

Life History: Frequently use the same nest site year after year. Nests are 20 to 30 feet above the ground and are usually made of a large stick platform, relined with fresh vegetation each year. Female lays 1 to 2 spotted white eggs, which hatch in 34 days. It is unknown when the young *fledge*.

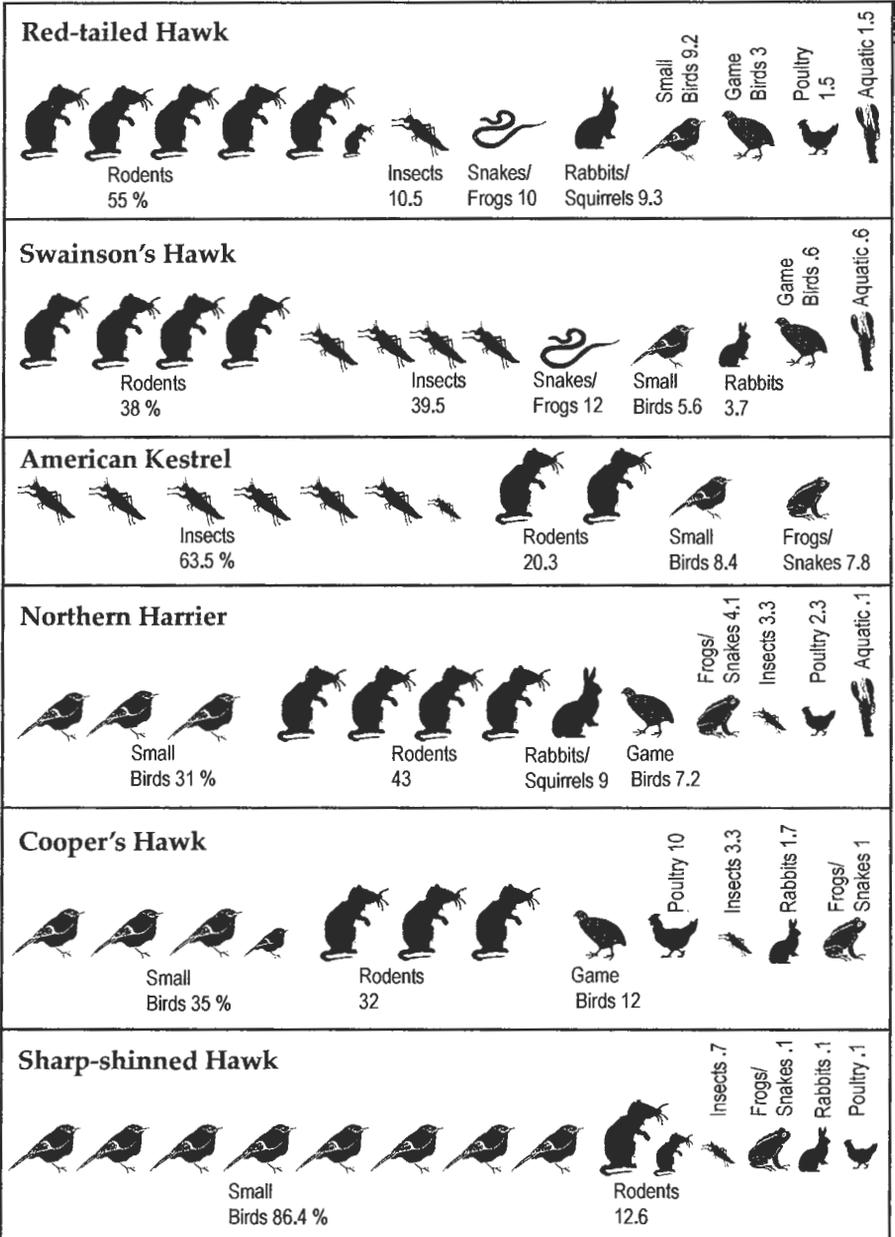
Comments: Because the Black Hawk is so dependent upon streamside habitats it is exposed to habitat loss from many human activities. It is included in the Arizona Game and Fish Department's listing of Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona.



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WHAT HAWKS EAT

Hawks, owls and other birds of prey have an important role within the environment. By preying upon small creatures such as *rodents*, *raptors* help to keep those populations under control. Doing so helps prevent problems such as crop damage, contamination of stored grain, or the spread of parasites and disease.



HARRIS'S HAWK: *Parabuteo unicinctus*



Spanish name: Aguililla cinchada

Description: Dark brown or black buteo with distinctive reddish brown patches on the thighs and shoulders. Tail is long with a white rump patch. Average wingspan is 46 inches. Young birds have streaked breasts and rusty shoulder patches.

Range: South central and southern Arizona.

Habitat: Saguaro-paloverde desert, mesquite washes and in cottonwood and willows along major stream banks.

Niche: Feed on small birds, *rodents* and reptiles. Often hunt in pairs or small groups.

Life History: Stick nests are built 0 to 30 feet above ground, in saguaros, paloverde trees or ironwood trees. Sometimes they are found on man-made structures such as windmills. Lay 3 to 4 white or blotched eggs, which hatch in 33 to 36 days. Young *fledge* in 43 to 49 days.

Comments: This hawk is unusual in that up to 5 adults will sometimes help care for the young of a nesting pair. Females may have more than one mate and adults commonly perch close together. Sometimes the birds will "stack" by perching on each other's backs. The call of the Harris's Hawk is a harsh "Karr."



ZONE-TAILED HAWK: *Buteo albonotatus*

Spanish name: Aguililla cola cinchada



Description: A black hawk with white tail bands and light wing tips. Wings are longer and narrower than most buteos. Wingspan is about 51 inches. The young have narrow tail bands and white spots on underparts.

Range: A summer resident of northwestern, central, south central and southeastern Arizona.

Habitat: Prefer to soar above mountains, heavily wooded canyons and stream bottoms.

Niche: A *diurnal* predator, feeding on reptiles, frogs, fish, birds and small mammals.

Life History: Breeding season begins in late April. Stick nests are built 25 to 50 feet in tall trees along major streams and canyons. Usually lay 2 spotted white eggs. *Incubation* lasts about 35 days. Time to *fledging* is unknown.

Comments: Often mistaken for the Turkey Vulture when it soars with its wings in a tilted "V." Will soar in groups of Turkey Vultures.



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OSPREY: *Pandion haliaetus*

Spanish name: Gavilan pescador

Description: A large hawk with a dark back and light underside. Unlike other hawks, they have a bend in their long wings. Adult birds have a black “wrist” visible from below. The head is white with a dark line through the eye. Wingspan is 58 to 72 inches.



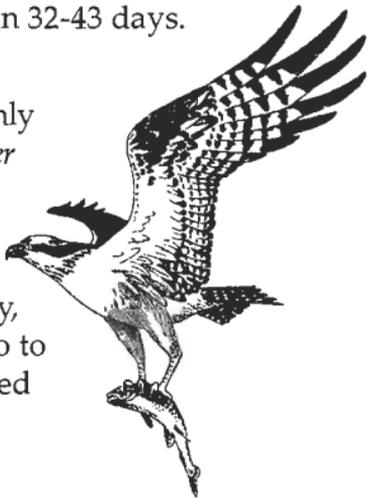
Range: Winter *migrants* through most of the state. They nest along the Verde River and other streams and rivers in central and eastern Arizona.

Habitat: Rivers, lakes and permanently flowing streams.

Niche: A *diurnal* predator, feeding exclusively on fish.

Life History: Ospreys re-use the same stick nests year after year. Nests are usually located 10 to 60 feet above the ground in tall snags near the water's edge. Lay 2 to 4, mostly brown, eggs, which hatch in 32-43 days. Young *fledge* in 48-59 days.

Comments: The Osprey is commonly called the “Fish Hawk.” It will *hover* 50 to 100 feet above the water; spot its prey, then plunge feet first into the water, often completely submerging. When flying with prey, Ospreys hold the fish like a torpedo to reduce wind resistance. It is included in the Arizona Game and Fish Department's listing of Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona.



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AMERICAN KESTREL: *Falco sparverius*

Spanish name: Cernicalo chitero



Description: The smallest falcon; it has a distinctive black and white face with a reddish-brown cap. The back is reddish-brown, barred with black and the tail is reddish-brown with a broad, black band near the tip. Pale breast is spotted with black. Males have slate-blue wings; females have reddish-brown wings. Wingspan is about 23 inches. The young resemble the same sex parent.

Range: Statewide

Habitat: A common bird found in farm fields, desert areas, open woodlands, vacant lots, suburban areas, grasslands and high mountain meadows.

Niche: Usually seen hunting from telephone poles and trees, the American Kestrel preys almost entirely on insects and small birds. It sometimes takes mice.

Life History: Nests in Flicker holes in trees and saguaros and in other abandoned cavity nests. Lay 3 to 7 buff eggs spotted with brown. The *incubation period* is 29 to 31 days and the young *fledge* in 30 to 31 days.

Comments: The American Kestrel is commonly known as the Sparrow Hawk. It is frequently seen *hovering* on rapidly beating wings.



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PRAIRIE FALCON: *Falco mexicanus*

Spanish name: Halcon cafe



Description: A light brown falcon with a lightly streaked breast. Most distinctive characteristic is the black patches under the base of the wings, seen from below. Also has a thin, brownish mustache. Wingspan is about 35 to 43 inches.

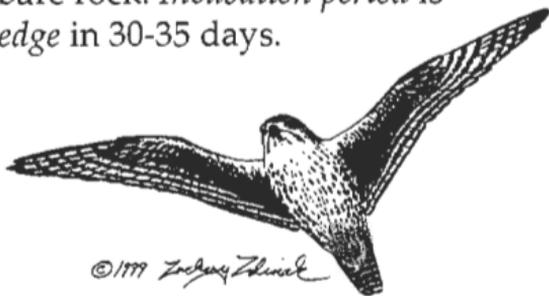
Range: Statewide.

Habitat: Various *habitats*, but prefers open grasslands and dry mountain regions. Almost never seen in forested areas.

Niche: A *diurnal* predator, feeds on small *rodents* and small birds.

Life History: Prefers to nests in protected pockets in cliffs usually 30 to 40 feet up, but occasionally up to 400+ feet. It will often re-use the same nest year after year. Usually does not build a nest; 2 to 7 reddish spotted eggs are laid on bare rock. *Incubation period* is 29-33 days and young *fledge* in 30-35 days.

Comments: This falcon is highly territorial and will aggressively attack any raptor that enters its breeding area.



PEREGRINE FALCON: *Falco peregrinus*

Spanish name: Hallcon pollero



Description: Heavy black mustache and dark cap, a slate-colored back and pale underparts with spots and bars. Wingspan is 36 to 44 inches.

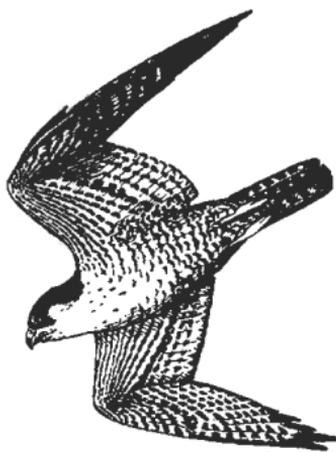
Range: Statewide

Habitat: Forested canyons and steep cliffs.

Niche: This fast flying predator preys almost entirely on birds such as ducks, pigeons and small birds.

Life History: Nest is usually a bare scrape on a high cliff ledge (50 to 200 feet above ground). Lay 2 to 6 reddish, white eggs. The *incubation period* is 29 to 32 days and the young *fledge* in 35 to 42 days.

Comments: Falcons dive on their prey with closed wings, at speeds exceeding 150 m.p.h.. They mate for life and return to the same nests each year. The Peregrine Falcon has recently been removed from the Endangered Species List, but is still included in the Arizona Game and Fish Department's listing of Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona.



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BARN OWL: *Tyto alba*

Spanish name: Llechuza



Description: The lightest colored owl in Arizona, it is medium-sized and has very long legs. Upper parts vary from pale rust to gray, underparts are white to pale rust and spotted or "V" marked with brown. Wingspan is about 42 inches. The heart-shaped face and dark eyes distinguish this bird from all other owls.

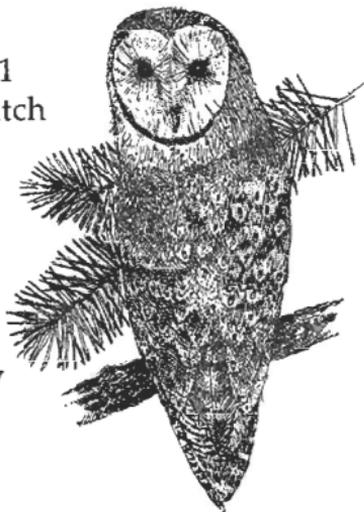
Range: Statewide

Habitat: Usually seen in farm fields, fairly common in urban areas in southern and western Arizona.

Niche: A *nocturnal* predator, feeds mainly on *rodents*, but will occasionally eat small birds, reptiles and bats.

Life History: Usually nests in old buildings or tree cavities. Lay 3 to 11 almost round, white eggs, which hatch in 30 to 34 days. The young are as large as their parents when they *fledge* at 52 to 56 days old.

Comments: The large ear openings of this bird enable it to capture its prey in total darkness by sound alone. The Barn Owl is often called the "Monkey Faced" Owl.



—Dummer—

SHORT-EARED OWL: *Asio flammeus*

Spanish name: Tecolote orejas cortas



Description: Medium-sized owl with a brownish back and lighter streaked underparts. The ears, for which it is named, are very hard to see. There is a dark patch on the curve of the wing near the shoulder. Wing shapes are more like those of hawks than of owls. Wingspan is 38 inches.

Range: An uncommon fall *migrant* statewide. Winters in crop lands along Salt, Gila and probably Colorado Rivers.

Habitat: Prefers open areas with low vegetation and marshes. Often found around agricultural areas in Arizona.

Niche: A partially *diurnal* predator, hunts for small *rodents*, birds, and insects.

Life History: Builds its nest in tall grass or weeds. Usually lay 4 to 7 (and up to 14) whitish eggs. The *incubation period* is 26 to 28 days. The young *fledge* at 31 to 36 days of age. Not believed to nest in Arizona.

Comments: Like most other owls they are often "mobbed" by other birds. The "mobbing" activity seems to be a defensive mechanism of the smaller birds, which may be preyed upon by owls.



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GREAT HORNED OWL: *Bubo virginianus*

Spanish name: Tecolote cornudo



Description: Large owl with prominent ear tufts. Ranges in color from dark brown to sandy brown. Breast may be white or rusty; underparts are finely barred with gray. Wingspan is 44 inches.

Range: Statewide

Habitat: Found in a wide variety of *habitats* statewide.

Niche: A *nocturnal* predator, eats rabbits, small *rodents*, small birds, and occasionally other, smaller raptors.

Life History: Nesting begins in early February, in a variety of sites, from stick nests on saguaros, to trees on vertical cliffs. Usually lay 2 to 3 white, oval eggs, occasionally up to 6. The *incubation period* is about 26 to 35 days with *fledging* at 35 days.

Comments: Roosting spots of Great Horned Owls can sometimes be located by the fresh “pellets” littering the ground. These pellets are made up of indigestible bones and fur from previous meals. The low-pitched call of the Great Horned Owl is undoubtedly the most easily recognized of all owl calls.



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MEXICAN SPOTTED OWL: *Strix occidentalis lucida*

Spanish name: Tecolote manchado



Description: A medium-sized owl with a rounded head and dark eyes. Dark brown body has horizontal barring of underparts and white spots on back. Wingspan is about 40 inches. Stands about 17 ½ inches tall.

Range: Statewide, but with a very irregular distribution.

Habitat: Prefers *coniferous* forests, especially spruce-fir or dense pine-oak and heavily wooded canyons.

Niche: Main diet is made up of large *rodents*.

Life History: Nests are 30 to 160 feet high in a variety of locations, such as a tree and canyon-wall cavities or old hawk nests. Usually lay 1 to 3 white eggs. The *incubation period* is 28 to 32 days and the young *fledge* at 34 to 36 days of age.

Comments: The status of the Mexican Spotted Owl is not well known in Arizona. It is likely that increased human activity in forests is a factor in the decline of Mexican Spotted Owls. The Spotted Owl is included in the Arizona Game and Fish Department's listing of Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona.



WESTERN SCREECH-OWL: *Otus Kennicotti*

Spanish name: Tecolotito chillon



Description: Small grayish or rusty brown owl with a lightly streaked breast. Small ear tufts and a round face. Wingspan is approximately 20 inches. Stands about 8 ½ inches tall.

Range: Statewide.

Habitat: Common in most vegetative *communities*, often found in towns, orchards or in river bottoms.

Niche: A *nocturnal* predator, feeds mainly on small *rodents*, insects, and small birds.

Life History: A cavity nester. Lay 2 to 6 white eggs, and like most owls, incubate each egg as it is laid, thus helping the adults to better raise their young according to the available food supply. The *incubation period* is 20 to 30 days. The young *fledge* in about 28 days.

Comments: Since the Western Screech-owl is one of the most common owls, its call can frequently be heard at night. The call is a quivering whistle or a series of short notes usually dropping in pitch at the end. When in danger, Western Screech-owls often “play dead.”



ELF OWL: *Micrathene whitneyi*

Spanish name: Tecolote enano



Description: Smallest owl found in North America, it is only 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches tall. Wingspan is about 13 inches. Brownish streaked back, buffy underparts, with a line of light spots over the wings.

Range: Found in central to southern Arizona from spring through fall. Elf Owls winter in Mexico.

Habitat: Found mainly in the saguaro-paloverde plant community of southern deserts. Occasionally found along streams in lower elevations.

Niche: A small *nocturnal* predator; it preys almost entirely on insects.

Life History: Nests at 15 to 35 feet in cavities dug into the saguaro cactus by other birds. Lay 1 to 5 whitish eggs, which are *incubated* for 24 days. The young *fledge* at 28 to 33 days of age.

Comments: Because of their use of the saguaro cactus, you can often see Elf Owls perched in the entrance to holes in the cactus at dusk. Their call is a rapid combination of high-pitched whistles.



NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL: *Glaucidium gnoma*

Spanish name: Picametate



Description: Small, long tailed owl, with a round head. Brownish with light spotting above; underside has dark brown streaks. Two dark spots at the base of the neck resemble eyes and are referred to as "eye-spots." Dark streaked sides. Wingspan is 12 inches. Stands 6 ¾ inches tall.

Range: A year-round resident statewide.

Habitat: Prefers dense *coniferous* and deciduous woodlands and riparian areas.

Niche: A partially *diurnal* predator, hunts small rodents, insects, and sometimes birds larger than itself.

Life History: Nests are usually built in a tree cavity, often in abandoned Woodpecker or Flicker nests, 8 to 20 feet above ground. Lay 2 to 7 white eggs. *Incubation* lasts for 28 days and the young *fledge* at 27 to 28 days old. Chicks hatch at different times.

Comments: Normally the male will supply food and protection to the nesting female. Call is a series of individual or double notes, as many as 80 notes per minute.



NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL: *Aegolius acadicus*

Spanish name: Lechucita cabezona



Description: Small, short tailed owl, with a brownish head, streaked with white. Whitish belly has reddish brown streaks. Eyes are yellow, beak is dark. Wingspan is about 17 inches. Stands about 8 inches tall.

Range: Found in dense mountain woodlands throughout the state year-round.

Habitat: Generally found in *coniferous* forests, and sometimes along mountain streams.

Niche: A *nocturnal* owl, hunts for small forest *rodents*, birds, and large insects.

Life History: Tend to nest in unused woodpecker holes or other tree cavities. Lay 3 to 10 whitish eggs that are *incubated* for 26 to 28 days. Young *fledge* at 27 to 34 days after hatching.

Comments: The Northern Saw-whet Owl may be more common than most people believe. Their status in Arizona is not well known. Their call is a long series of monotonous, short-whistled notes. They also make a whistling sound.



BURROWING OWL: *Athene cunicularia*

Spanish name: Lechuza de hojo



Description: Small, long-legged owl. Light sandy brown in color with white spots and bars. Legs are bare. Wingspan is about 21 inches.

Range: Statewide.

Habitat: Usually found in open grasslands, farm fields, and weedy lots.

Niche: An insect-eating bird, it also eats scorpions, and mice on occasion. It hunts day or night.

Life History: Breeding season is April to June. Nests are built in the bottoms of prairie dog, squirrel, fox, or skunk dens. Lay 6 to 11 small, round, white or tan eggs. The eggs hatch in 21 to 28 days and the young *fledge* in 28 days.

Comments: The chicks in the burrow may emit a sound like a rattlesnake buzz when disturbed. These owls are decreasing in number due to development of farmland, poisoning of prairie dogs, and heavy use of insecticides.



VOCABULARY

bird of prey: a bird that feeds chiefly on meat (also known as *raptor*).

carrion: dead and decaying flesh.

community: an association of living things, plant and animal, each occupying a certain position or *ecological niche*, inhabiting a common environment and interacting with each other.

coniferous: refers to cone-bearing; a coniferous forest is one made up of pines, firs, spruces or other evergreen trees.

coverts: the small feathers on top of the wings (wing coverts) and over the tail feathers (uppertail coverts). There are also undertail coverts.

diurnal: active by daylight; the opposite of *nocturnal*.

ecological niche: the role played by an organism in a biological community; its food preferences, requirements for shelter, special behaviors, and activity period (e.g., nocturnal or diurnal). The ecological niche of an organism has little to do with where it is found, but much more to do with its function or role.

ledge: to grow the wing feathers and strength necessary for flight; to become capable of flight and independent activity.

habitat: the arrangement of food, water, shelter and space suitable to animals' needs.

hovering: to hang suspended in the air over a spot by using wing movements.

VOCABULARY

incubation period: the length of time from when an egg is laid until it hatches.

migrant: an animal that moves from one *habitat* to another.

plumage: collectively, the feathers on a bird; the feather is the unit of the plumage.

primary feathers: the outermost 10 feathers of a bird's wing; the major flight feathers.

raptor: see bird of prey.

riparian: referring to the banks of streams, rivers or lakes.

rodent: mammals with a single pair of continuously growing, sharp chisel-like upper teeth. Rodents include: squirrels, gophers, mice, rats, beavers, and porcupines.

scavenger: an organism that habitually feeds on *carrion*.

species: a population of individuals that are more or less alike and that are able to breed and produce fertile offspring. A category of biological grouping just below the genus or subgenus level.

Sources for information included in this booklet: National Geographic's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* was used to verify description, range, and habitat information. Niche and life history information was gathered from *The Birder's Handbook* by Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye. The *Sibley Guide to Birds* by David Allen Sibley was mainly used as a second reference as well as for owl wingspans.

All birds of prey are protected in Arizona. If you observe any violations of game laws, call: 1-800-352-0700.