

Return of bird friends mark season's change

Second in a series of articles called "Signs of fall."

by Nancy Laizure

Shorter days and cooler nights bring many changes in our desert. September and October will mark a shift in the species of birds who are not our year-round residents.

The Lesser nighthawks, that are seen circling outdoor floodlights in their search for flying insects, are gone.

The Turkey vultures are still here, but they will soon move

Birds banded by Radke return to her yard year after year. She has recorded that they come together, also. She has banded a pair that has for years appeared back at the same exact time. As of noon Sept. 27, no White-crowned sparrows have been spotted by either Radke or Jones, but keep an eye on your feeder because they are due anytime.

The white-crowned sparrows are represented by two subspecies: the Gambel's from

winters here, coming from as far north as Canada.

Some of the less-commonly seen species are the Green-tailed towhee, Cedar waxwing, Benwick's wren, Canyon wren and Rock wren.

Some species of birds are semi-migratory, meaning that they move to slightly higher elevations in the summer months. These include the Black-throated sparrow, the phainopepla and the Cooper's hawk. The Black-throated sparrows are back, and have been spotted by Radke; and just this week I have seen a pair of phainopeplas in Rowe Wash.

The Cooper's hawk will be sighted near water, along Cave Creek, a little higher up. Some Cooper's hawks, however, are year-round residents.

Meanwhile, with all this coming and going be sure to watch for our year-round residents — the cardinal, House finch, Mourning dove, verdin, Black-tailed gnatcatcher, Cactus wren, Curve-billed thrasher, Harris' and Red-tailed hawks, Great horned and Screech owls, Gilded flicker, Ladderback and Gila woodpeckers, some of Anna's and Costa's hummingbirds — who choose to stay all year, and of course the Gambel's quail and roadrunner.



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south for the winter. Western kingbirds, orioles, Brown-headed and Bronzed cowbirds, most Great-tailed grackles, White-winged doves, Black-chinned hummingbirds and Elf owls either have left or will soon be leaving our area to enjoy a warm winter in Mexico or Central America. The Rufous hummingbird is now being sighted as he is passing through our area.

In their place, we will see the White-crowned sparrows who return to the Foothills the last week of September.

Eleanor Radke and Ellis Jones have, for years, recorded dates of first sightings from Sept. 23 to Oct. 2. These are the sparrows with bright black-and-white stripes on their heads. Not only are they accurate in time but also in place.

Canada and Alaska, and the Oriantha from Colorado. The Oriantha has a black spot between the eye and the bill. Some individuals are just passing through on their way to Southeast Arizona and Mexico.

Also arriving here are the Ruby-crowned kinglet, Say's phoebe, Sage and Crissal thrashers, Lawrence's goldfinch, Lesser goldfinch, Anna's hummingbird and Costa's hummingbird. The Loggerhead shrike