

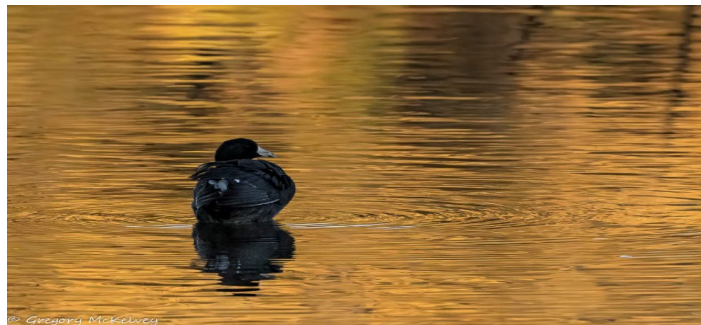


Urban Avian Photography

Ink Free # 5

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Might you be fascinated by photographing birds yet have no time or physical capacity to attend workshops or take long journies? As any subscriber to Arizona Highways already knows, Arizona hosts a remarkable permanent and migratory population of raptors, hummingbirds, waterfowl, small birds, soaring birds, and ground-comfortable birds. To enjoy or photograph many of the 570 species known in Arizona, the easiest, inexpensive, time-efficient, and handicap-accessible venues are the Urban lakes, ponds, and water reclamation sites throughout the state. Visit at different times of the year and find migrating species, changing light, seasons, and feelings. A cup of java is extra, yet welcome.



Of course, the more advanced birders, photographers, and enthusiasts travel to Arizona's world-renowned, often more remote locations. Some are difficult to access but always rewarding. Yet the local urban settings offer a unique opportunity to see, enjoy, observe, or photograph various birds. Many "A-List" photographers for Arizona Highways Magazine frequent urban birding areas, including Gilbert's Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch, Payson's Green Valley lakes, Sweetwater Draw in Tucson, and Prescott's Watson Woods Riparian Preserve. These areas are that good! And accessible by anyone.

Birds concentrate in natural habitats, local lakes, along rivers, and within significant migration flyways. The accessible Urban areas in Arizona are often the community fishing and water reclamation areas. There are likely a few near you.

Phoenix area – 29 waters
Yuma area – 5 waters
Casa Grande area – 1 water
Prescott Valley area – 2 waters
Tucson area – 4 waters
Town of Payson – Green Valley Lakes
Ash Fork – Stone Dam
St. Johns – Patterson Ponds
Show Low Creek Meadow
Safford Area

All the spectacular birding areas in Arizona are easily found on the Cornell University Ibirds website, which lists bird hot spots in the United States (<https://ebird.org/explore>). Check out the Arizona bird hotspot map at (<https://ebird.org/hotspots?hs=L144858>). Local Audubon Societies are always an excellent source for local details. A few examples of Arizona's urban treasures are:

The Green Valley lakes in Payson (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L789339/bird-list>) host over 200 specials from Bald Eagles, Osprey, Grebe, Canada Goose, etc. Four distinct seasons offer year-round species variety and scenery.



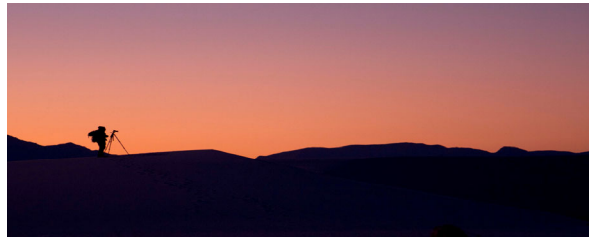
Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch (<https://ebird.org/hotspots?hs=L789339>) boasts over 324 bird species, including pelican, Sponebill, egrets, and herons. Perhaps the most prolific bird concentrations are in Arizona. Easy trails, rest stops, and observation blinds provide comfortable, safe, and easy observation.



Sweetwater Wetlands, Tucson (<https://ebird.org/hotspots?hs=L144858>) records over 320 bird species yearly. Migratory birds visit each spring and Fall. Beyond birds, a local bobcat family is a popular photographic subject.



Watson Woods Riparian Preserve, Prescott (<https://ebird.org/hotspots?hs=L144858>) lists over 285 bird species. Giant granite boulders with scrub trees and marsh reed area offer excellent context backdrops for any photographer. The cottonwood and willow trees at this 126-acre site offer shade for land-loving wildlife like the Mexican vole and provide homes for the water birds and migrant shorebirds that visit during the winter. Other cool-weather birds include the stately bald eagle, peregrine, and osprey. You might spot breeding birds such as wood ducks and yellow warblers in summer.



Bird photography in wildlife-rich Arizona should not be only for the affluent and fit. Excellent photography exists in easily accessible urban settings. Some of the best birding areas in the western United States have handicapped parking, well-maintained trails, amazing and safe observation areas, and four seasons full of permanent and migrating birds. Arizona's highways offer something for everyone.

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publication from

Greg McKelvey

gemprrsphotos@gmail.com
Tucson, Arizona

Pondering along in old age without fear, excepting what I can do
Enjoying every minute of it!