

# BIRDS OF SWEETWATER WETLANDS



Photo : Paul Berquist

## GAMBEL'S QUAIL – *Callipepla gambelii*

Range – Throughout the southwest deserts in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Also in desert habitats of southern Nevada and Utah.

Habitat – Desert grassland and desert scrub.

Food – These quail feed on seeds, grains, some insects, berries and succulent green vegetation. Gambel's quail also feed on the buds of mesquite flowers.

Other – In fall and winter, Gambel's quail can be seen in large coveys (groups) of up to 40 birds. In spring, the birds break up into pairs for courtship and nesting. They are ground-nesting birds, preyed upon by snakes, birds of prey, and coyotes.

## ABERT'S TOWHEE – *Pipilo aberti*

Range – Southern and western Arizona north to southern Nevada.

Habitat – Brushy areas and thickets in desert scrub, riparian areas and woodlands. Often near water.

Food – Abert's towhees forage on the ground by raking at underbrush to uncover seeds and insects.

Other – A shy, somewhat secretive bird that is usually detected by its call which is a high pitched “peek”. They are usually alone or in pairs.



Photo : Earle Robinson



Photo : Greg Clark

## CACTUS WREN – *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*

Range – Southwestern U.S. to central and northeastern Mexico, including Baja California.

Habitat – Desert flatlands and foothills where large cacti are found. They also occur in urban areas within their range.

Food – They feed on insects and other arthropods, fruits and seeds.

Other – Cactus wrens are very busy and inquisitive birds. They usually build their spherical nests among the spiny stems of cholla cacti but may use palo verde, acacia, or saguaro. They are known to build “decoy” nests, which may distract predators from the real nest with the young.

## RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD – *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Range – Across the entire U.S. through Canada and into western Mexico.

Habitat – Among the vegetation in wetlands, riparian areas and fields near water.

Food – These blackbirds eat seeds, grains and some fruits. They also eat insects and spiders.

Other – Red-winged blackbirds can be seen in large flocks, year-round among the cattails and bulrush at Sweetwater Wetlands. Their calls are very distinctive, sounding gurgling and metallic. The black males have prominent, red wing patch



Photo : Paul Berquist



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## YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD – *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

Range – Breeds in the mid-western U.S. into Canada. Winters in the southwestern U.S. and Mexico.

Habitat – Wetlands, ponds and lakes with lots of reeds, and agricultural fields.

Food – They eat seeds, grains, insects and some snails.

Other – Yellow-headed blackbirds hang out in large flocks. They are mainly a spring, fall and winter visitor to Sweetwater Wetlands and can be seen on emergent vegetation.



Photo : Earle Robinson

#### GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE – *Quiscalus mexicanus*

Range – Southwestern U.S. from California to Louisiana. North to Nebraska and south through Mexico.

Habitat – Fields, farms, riparian areas, wetlands and urban parks. Common around neighborhoods and parking lots.

Food – Grackles are opportunistic feeders, eating insects, small birds, a variety of invertebrates and even small fish and frogs. They also eat seeds and berries.

Other – These large, black birds have an iridescent purple sheen to their feathers. Males have a long tails that they fold length-wise like a keel. Grackles often form large flocks. Their loud calls are almost always heard at Sweetwater Wetlands.

#### GREATER ROADRUNNER – *Geococcyx californianus*

Range – Southwestern U.S. from north-central California to east Texas. South to Mexico and Baja California.

Habitat – Desert scrub, chaparral, brushy areas, and some oak woodlands.

Food – Roadrunners are predators. They eat a variety of prey including snakes, lizards, mice and insects. They typically chase down their prey. They will eat some seeds and cactus fruit.

Other – Roadrunners seldom fly. When surprised or startled, they usually run away. Roadrunner tracks are easy to identify. They have two toes facing forward and two backward, which helps them run fast. They build their nest of twigs in small trees or sometimes in cholla cactus.



Photo : Paul Berquist



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#### GILA WOODPECKER – *Melanerpes uropygialis*

Range – Southern Arizona to Nevada and south into western Mexico and Baja California.

Habitat – Desert scrub mainly in habitats that include saguaro cactus. Also around riparian woodland and urban areas.

Food – Gila woodpeckers are primarily insect eaters, searching for prey on a variety of desert trees.

Other – Gila woodpeckers are cavity nesters. They use their strong, pointy bills to make holes primarily in saguaro cactus. They are the most common woodpecker in the desert and can be seen year-around.

#### BLACK PHOEBE – *Sayornis nigricans*

Range – From northern California across the southwestern U.S. to west Texas. South to into Mexico and Baja California.

Habitat – Streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands and urban ponds. Often seen perched on branches by the water's edge.

Food – Black phoebes mainly eat flying, aquatic insects. They have keen eyesight and catch the insects in the air.

Other – Black phoebes are year-round residents at Sweetwater and are often seen near "Hidden Pond." Their nests are made of mud attached to a rock face near water. Their song is a repetitious "fee-bee".



Photo : Earle Robinson



Photo : Earle Robinson

#### HARRIS'S HAWK – *Parabuteo unicinctus*

Range – In the U.S., found only in southern Arizona and south-western Texas. South into mainland Mexico and Baja California.

Habitat – Desert scrub, cactus and mesquite forests, brushy fields and open woodlands.

Food – These birds of prey eat small mammals, birds and reptiles. They are known to hunt cooperatively, taking turns to chase down prey until the kill is made.

Other – Harris's hawks are frequently seen at Sweetwater Wetlands. They often perch on the tallest trees in the area and sometimes nest nearby.



Photo : Paul Berquist

#### AMERICAN KESTREL – *Falco sparverius*

Range – Throughout most of North America, through Mexico and into South America.

Habitat – Open country, farm fields, roadsides, and urban parks.

Food – Kestrels eat small rodents, reptiles, birds and large insects. They are also known to eat frogs and bats.

Other – These small falcons can be seen perched on fence posts and wires. They will bob their tails while perched. They often hover while hunting. Kestrels are cavity nesters (they nest in holes) and will use large nest boxes. They can be seen year-round at Sweetwater Wetlands

#### PEREGRINE FALCON – *Falco peregrinus*

Range – Nearly world-wide but only in suitable habitat.

Habitat – Open country with nearby cliffs, rocky canyons, cities with tall buildings, and cliff faces along seashores.

Food – Peregrines primarily eat other birds, which they catch on the wing. They prefer ducks, quail, pigeons, doves and other medium to large birds.

Other – Peregrines are known to reach speeds of up to 175 mph in a dive. They can be seen hunting around Sweetwater Wetlands during migration and in the winter.



Photo : AZ Game and Fish Department



Photo : Paul Berquist

#### GREAT BLUE HERON – *Ardea herodias*

Range – World-wide in suitable habitat of temperate and tropical regions.

Habitat – Along the shorelines of most bodies of water including wetlands, seashores, lakes, and rivers.

Food – Great blue herons stand very still while hunting for fish, frogs and large invertebrates. They jab their long bills suddenly into the water to catch their prey.

Other – These large herons are seen only occasionally at Sweetwater Wetlands.

#### MOURNING DOVE – *Zenaida macroura*

Range – Throughout the U.S. into central Canada and south through Central America.

Habitat – In a variety of habitats including desert scrub, grasslands, farms, cities, parks, and open woodlands.

Food – These doves eat a variety of seeds.

Other – Mourning doves are year-round residents at Sweetwater Wetlands. Their mournful "coo coo coo" is frequently heard.



Photo : Paul Berquist



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#### WHITE-WINGED DOVE – *Zenaida asiatica*

Range – In the extreme southern portions of the U.S. and throughout Mexico to Central America.

Habitat – Saguaro forests, mesquite forests, fields, urban areas and riparian woodlands.

Food – White-winged doves mainly eat seeds. They also eat berries and cactus fruit.

Other – These large doves are only seen at Sweetwater Wetlands during the warmer months as they fly south for the winter.



Photo : Doug Backlund

#### SONG SPARROW – *Melospiza melodia*

Range – Across the U.S., through Canada and into southern Alaska.

Habitat – Riparian scrub, thickets, woodland edges, and brushy areas.

Food – Song sparrows eat a variety of insects, seeds, berries, and grains.

Other – Song sparrows are commonly seen and heard at Sweetwater Wetlands. They forage around the base of bushes and sometimes hop into the open on a higher perch to belt out their melodious tunes. Their distinct song starts with two or three clear whistles followed by a loud trill.

#### EUROPEAN STARLING – *Sternus vulgaris*

Range – Across the U.S. north into Canada and south through Mexico. Also in Europe and Asia.

Habitat – Urban settings, fields, woodlands, grasslands and farms.

Food – Starlings eat a variety of insects, fruits and seeds.

Other – Starlings were introduced into the U.S. from Eurasia. They have now spread across the country and are considered an invasive species. They are a cavity nester and will take nest holes that would otherwise be used by native species.



Photo : Earle Robinson



Photo : Paul Berquist

#### KILLDEER – *Charadrius vociferus*

Range – From Canada, throughout the U.S. and south into Mexico.

Habitat – Open fields, mudflats, airports, golf courses, grassy lawns and flat, rocky shores.

Food – Killdeer primarily eat insects.

Other – They are named for their call which sounds like a loud “killdeer, killdeer.” They will pretend to have a broken wing in order to lure intruders away from their nests. Killdeer are common at Sweetwater Wetland’s recharge basins.

#### CINNAMON TEAL – *Anas cyanoptera*

Range – From southwestern Canada, through the western U.S. and into Mexico.

Habitat – Ponds, small lakes and wetlands.

Food – Cinnamon teal eat a variety of aquatic plants and insects. They also eat snails and other aquatic invertebrates and some grains. They skim the water with their bills and also dip below the water to reach food items.

Other – The males of these striking ducks are easy to identify with their dark chestnut plumage. The females are a mottled brown color. Males go through an “eclipse plumage” stage in late summer during which they resemble the females. They are seen at Sweetwater Wetlands mostly during migration and through the winter.



Photo : Paul Berquist



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#### AMERICAN WIGEON – *Anas americana*

Range – Breeds in Alaska, Canada and the northern United States. Winters in the southern U.S. and into Mexico.

Habitat – Ponds, lakes, wetlands, bays and shorelines.

Food – These dabbling ducks mainly eat plant material but will occasionally eat aquatic invertebrates.

Other – Male wigeons go through their “eclipse plumage” stage during late summer and early fall. Wigeons are seen mostly during the winter at Sweetwater Wetlands.



Photo : Paul Berquist

**NORTHERN SHOVELER – *Anas clypeata***

Range – Throughout western North America. Winters in the southern states across the U.S. and into Mexico.

Habitat – Ponds, lakes and wetlands. Sometimes winter in saltwater bays.

Food – Shovelers use their large bills to strain the water for plant matter and aquatic insects.

Other – Their large, shovel-like bills are distinct on both sexes. Males go through an “eclipse plumage” stage in late summer during which they resemble the females. During the winter, these ducks can be seen all over Sweetwater’s ponds as well as resting on the islands.

**MALLARD – *Anas platyrhynchos***

Range – Throughout most of North America south into Mexico. Also in Africa and India.

Habitat – Ponds, lakes, rivers and wetlands. Common in ponds of city parks.

Food – Mallards eat plant material and some aquatic insects.

Other – These very common ducks are seen year-round at Sweetwater Wetlands. Males resemble females in the late summer during their “eclipse plumage” stage.



Photo : Paul Berquist



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**RUDDY DUCK – *Oxyura jamaicensis***

Range – Breeds in the western U. S. and Canada. Winters in the southern U.S. into Mexico. Some populations occur in South America.

Habitat – Lakes, ponds and wetlands.

Food – Ruddy ducks are diving ducks, diving underwater to find their food. They eat aquatic invertebrates and plant material.

Other – These ducks have a distinct, perky tail. In breeding plumage during the spring and summer, the bills of the males are bright blue. Ruddy ducks are seen year-round at Sweetwater Wetlands.

**AMERICAN COOT – *Fulica americana***

Range – Throughout North and South America except in the coldest regions.

Habitat – Ponds, lakes, wetlands and urban parks with water.

Food – Coots mainly eat aquatic vegetation. They can be seen with their tails in the air as they forage in the water. They also dive deeper for aquatic invertebrates and some fish and amphibians.

Other – Coots are not ducks but are in the rail family. Instead of webbed feet, their toes are separated. They are year-round residents at Sweetwater Wetlands. They nest in the tall bulrush and cattails. Young coots with their red-orange heads can be seen in the spring.



Photo : Paul Berquist



Photo : Paul Berquist

**COMMON MOORHEN – *Gallinula chloropus***

Range – Locally in southern Arizona and New Mexico, and along the coast of California. Also in southern Gulf states of Texas, Louisiana and Florida. South to South America.

Habitat – Freshwater wetlands and marshes, ponds and lakes usually with emergent vegetation.

Food – Moorhens primarily eat aquatic vegetation. They also eat a variety of invertebrates including insects and snails.

Other – Moorhens, like coots, are rails, not ducks. They can be seen year-round walking over fallen emergent vegetation and swimming in the ponds at Sweetwater Wetlands.