

## **BIRDS OF HILLCREST**

**By Ed Jeter**

Our Hillcrest community is like “a little island in the city”. And with it’s many mature trees and shrubbery features, Hillcrest is also a quiet haven for many bird species – more than 50 species at present count.

Some of the birds are with us year around, while others are seasonal migrants, and still others are migrants staying only a day or two. Among the most noticeable and vocal are our four dove species. The Mourning, newly-introduced Eurasian Collared, and dwindling Inca doves are with us all year. While the White-Winged doves arrive in the spring in time to mate and nest, and then start departing to the south in August. Another interesting and colorful group are our woodpeckers. We frequently hear the calls and rat-a-tat of Gila Woodpeckers, Gilded Flickers, and Red-Naped Sapsuckers. Our hummingbirds are a very entertaining bunch with Anna’s here all year and some seasonal visits from Costa’s and Black-Chinned at the feeders and yard flowers. The Northern Mockingbirds serenade us even after dark during their nesting season. We have a group that I call the “desert birds” because they are frequent in the more arid areas outside the city as well. These are our Abert’s Towhee, Cactus Wren, Gambel’s Quail, and the Curve-Bill Thrasher has a call sounding like a wolf-whistle. A couple more that would fit in this category are the tiny Verdin with it’s rapid chip call, and the Lesser Goldfinch with it’s very soft plaintive call. The Abert’s Towhee is almost endemic in Arizona, that is, almost it’s entire geographic range is in our state. Over the past couple of years we have had a permanent presence and nesting of Say’s Phoebes in Hillcrest – they are flycatchers and swoop down from a perch to catch insects. A group of our birds that some would consider pests are the English Sparrow, Starling, House Finch, and Brown-Headed Cowbird. And of course, the Pigeons and Great-Tailed Grackles are here in abundance.

It’s hard not to miss a couple of colonies of Peach Faced Lovebirds in our community’s large palm trees. They are not only among the most colorful birds we have, but also among the loudest, with their squeaky-hinge type calls. They have recently been renamed Rosy-faced Lovebirds.

Birds that we observe mostly flying over are Canada Geese; some migrating in season, and some here year around. We have an occasional Red-Tailed Hawk soaring over, Common Ravens, and in recent years we have a family of attractive Harris Hawks, which are frequently seen hunting or nesting.

Cooper's Hawks and the occasional Sharp-Shinned Hawk are busy chasing our doves during the cooler months. We have a Kestrel pair that nest in a palm tree within the pool enclosure and are active catching insects and rodents around the area. During late summer evenings the Lesser Night-Hawks are busy swooping around catching insects. Great Horned Owls are hooting back and forth at dusk; and there have been reports of the presence of the diminutive Western Screech Owls.

Fall and winter bring some wonderful feathered friends to stay for anywhere from a few days to a few months. These include the White-Crowned Sparrows with their distinctive song, furtive Lincoln's Sparrows, the beautiful Spotted Towhee, Green-Tailed Towhee, American Robin, House Wren, and Juncos. We also have brief visits from various migrant warblers including Orange-Crowned, Audubon's, and McGillivray's.

There are a few birds that have made a rare, one-time visit here. These include a Prairie Falcon fly-over, Swainson's Thrush, Cassin's Kingbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Cardinal, Rock Wren, Ringed Turtle Dove, Meadowlark, Phainopepla, and Lazuli Bunting.

So take a relaxing stroll around our streets and parks early some morning and enjoy our feathered friends busily involved in their daily activities. Or better yet, enjoy them up close and personal in your backyard by putting in a birdbath, hummingbird feeders, seed feeders and/or a quail block, and some bird friendly plantings.

Photos by Ed Jeter

*Abert's Towhee*



*Curve-billed Thrasher*



*Eurasian Collared Dove*



*Green-tailed Towhee*



*Immature Say's Phoebe*



*Lesser Goldfinch*



*Mourning Dove*



*Rosy-faced Lovebird*



*Spotted Towhee*



*White-crowned Sparrow*



*White-winged Dove*



*Immature Red-Naped Sapsucker*

