

Mazatzal Mountains (Gila, Yavapai, & Maricopa Counties) 14-16 July 2017

By Felipe Guerrero, edited by Eric Hough

Our latest expedition was a backpacking trip up into the Mazatzal Mountains on 14-16 July 2017. The expedition was based at the Peeley Trailhead, near the point where the Gila, Maricopa and Yavapai county lines intersect in central Arizona. The Mazatzal Mountains lie north of the Superstition Mountains and include the familiar sights of Four Peaks and Mt. Ord. Although this mountain range is biologically diverse and fairly accessible by trail, few birders visit the area.



Can you spot the Montezuma Quail? (© Larry Langstaff)

We birded in all three counties at one time or another during the weekend. One of several notable records from Gila County was a pair of Montezuma Quail, a first for these mountains. This species is rare and local in the county, with sparse fall and winter records along the Mogollon Rim; mid-July reports from Young and along the Black River at Deer Creek indicate probable breeding there. Historically, Montezuma Quail ranged as far west as Camp Verde. Also in Gila

County, breeding was confirmed for Cooper's Hawk (fledglings) and Hepatic Tanager (feeding young). Two Gray Vireos singing from chaparral woodland were probable breeding birds, while Red Crossbill, Lazuli Bunting and Hooded Oriole were possible breeders. Two vocal Spotted Owls suggest continued breeding in this part of the Tonto National Forest.



Painted Redstart (© Larry Langstaff).

In Yavapai County, a Peregrine Falcon calling from above cliff faces and steep mountain slopes was a probable breeder and a first for that location. Also notable was a Red-breasted Nuthatch calling from an isolated forest along Sheep Creek, suggesting possible breeding.

We finished with 53 species, all of which are entered in the eBird database (see links below). I want to thank Keziah Conrad, Brett Gleitsmann, Trevor Hinckley and Larry Langstaff for joining me on this expedition.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39000863>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39000879>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39000907>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39000957>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39000976>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39000983>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39000995>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39001019>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39001026>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S39001045>