Stuart Healy
Western U.S. Bird Guide

Information about my
SOUTHEAST ARIZONA
MONTHLY CHECKLISTS

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General Information

These checklists cover southeast Arizona (see *Checklist Area*) and provide detailed information for each month. I created the checklists to help you identify target species for the month of your visit. However, they obviously have greater utility beyond this primary purpose.

I published the original versions in 1996. The most recent release was published in October 2011. **Please let me know about any errors -- thanks**.

January 2011
This release updates the checklist taxonomy to AOU 7th edition, 51st supplement and Clements 2010 (December). There are also a few minor changes in status and abundance. Get used to some weird stuff (such as longspurs before the warblers!).

October 2009
This release corrects a few errors and incorporates minor changes in status and abundance for a number of species since the last release in 2005. For example, the formerly rare and local Eurasian Collared-Dove is now uncommon and quite widespread.

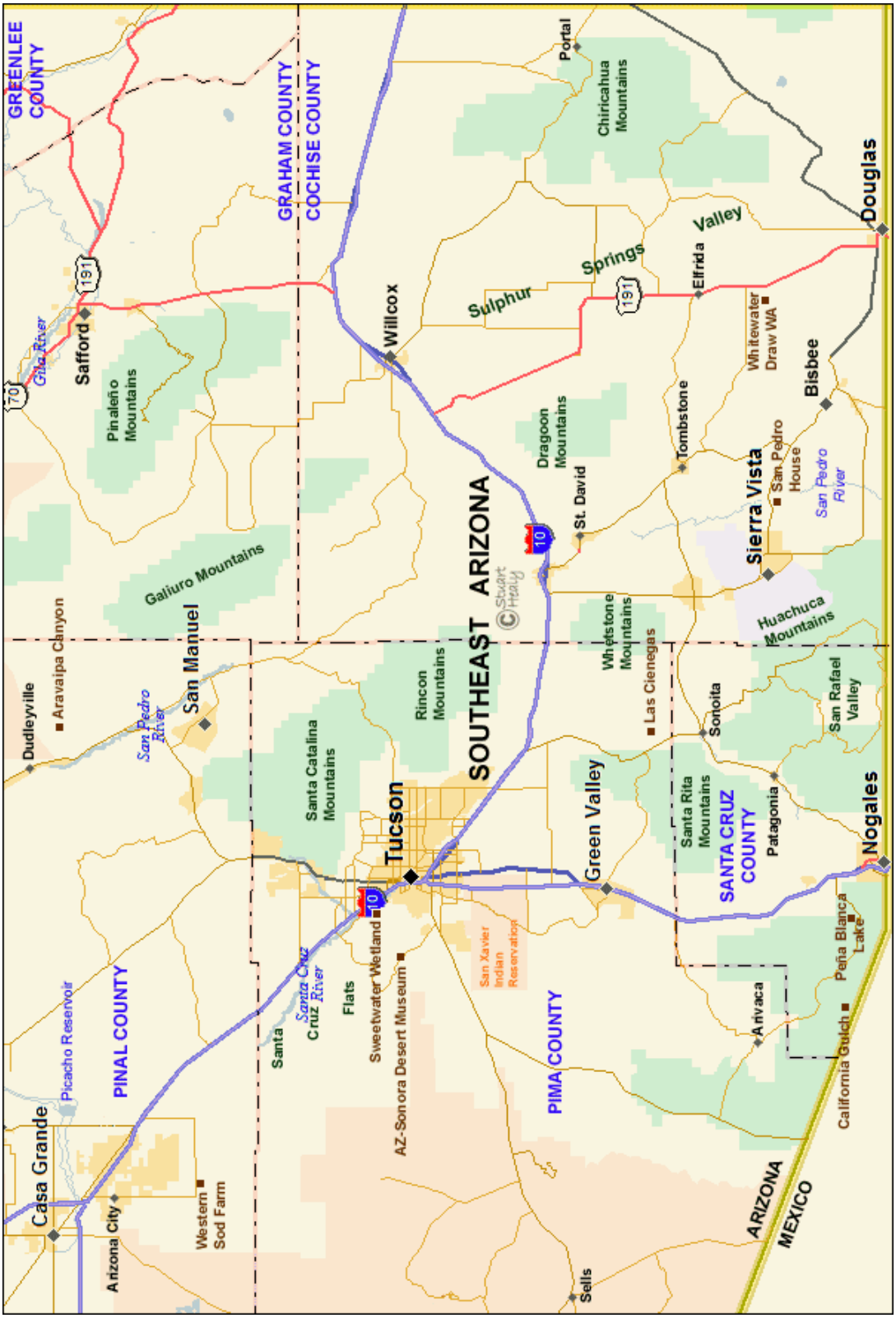
Target list "forms" are no longer supported with this release.

March 2005
This release was a complete revision of my original checklists created in 1996. In addition to revised content in terms of status and abundance, this release provided checklists in either Clements or AOU order formatted as HTML, WORD and PDF documents.

Copyright Information

Checklist Area

The checklists cover the area of Arizona from the border with Mexico to just north of Dudleyville (latitude 112); and from the New Mexico state line to just west of Sells (longitude 33). The coverage area is as shown in the map below and is the generally accepted definition of southeast Arizona. Data is derived from currently published information and from my own observations since 1993.



Viewing and printing checklists

The screenshot below shows the contents page displayed when the checklist main page is invoked. From here you can display detailed information about the checklists (this document); select the taxonomy that will be applied to all checklists subsequently selected; and display and print checklists in three formats.

Checklist Taxonomy

Checklists are available in Clements and AOU taxonomic order. Everybody has their own preference. I'm an AviSys user so I have to put up with Clements order. You can toggle the order by clicking the "Switch to AOU" or "Switch to Clements" link. Be sure to select the order before displaying a checklist.

Format options

After selecting the taxonomic order, click the monthly links in the appropriate boxes to display checklists in one of the following formats.

HTML format

This format is single column and intended for general browser viewing. If printed, checklists will be about 8-9 pages.

Microsoft WORD and Adobe PDF documents

Both these formats are two pages, four columns per page. You can easily create a three-fold field checklist by double sided printing each page. Stiff card stock works best for this of course. If you use regular paper, you don't even need to print double sided - just lay the two separately printed pages back to back before folding to create a thicker, more substantial result.

Users who own WORD software can also edit and mark up the checklists. Although the checklists were created using WORD 2007, they are saved in WORD 1997-2003 format for compatibility. If the checklists do not display properly in four columns, make sure that "Print Layout" is selected in WORD "view options" and set the magnification to "fit page", or as you prefer. Also, make sure that the left, right and top margins in WORD are set to 0.3 inch and the bottom margin is set to 0.25 inch. Checklists should automatically open in a new window. If not, right-click on the monthly links if you have problems getting the checklists to fill the display.

For problem free formatting and printing (famous last words), use the PDF versions that can easily be read by anyone who has the free Adobe reader.

Printing Tip

When printing a WORD or PDF document, make sure that scaling is set to "none" in the printer dialog box. Depending on the printer that you use, you may get a warning message from the printing software about the document being "outside of the printer physical margins". Continue anyway and see how it looks. If too much clipping occurs, you will need to select "scale to fit" when printing and just hope that it still looks okay.

Generating Target Lists

There are a couple of ways to use the checklists to submit a list of target birds to me.

The quick and dirty method is simply to cut and paste the HTML checklist into a text editor and delete the species that are not of interest.

To copy the checklist, display the checklist then right-click on the main checklist window. Click “select all” from the pop-up menu; right-click again and select “copy” from the pop-up menu. Paste the selected text into your editor of choice. Perform the deletions and save the edited file to your local machine. Send as an email attachment (or paste into the body of the email).

If you are a Microsoft Word user, you can mark up the Word format checklist (just “x” the boxes, or highlight each species in color); save the marked up version to your local machine than send as an email attachment.

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Background

I created the initial versions of my southeastern Arizona monthly checklists in 1996, about 3 years after I started guiding here. Back then, the main purpose was to provide prospective clients with a realistic view of the potential species during the specific month of their visit. This was a successful venture and the checklists still provide that function today. However, the initial versions were created entirely "by hand". This required poring over data and using a text editor to create those lines of dots and abundance codes. Underlining, italicizing, capitalizing. Yikes! Needless to say, I realized that I couldn't continue to produce them in such a slow and tedious manner and I thought about ways to automate the task. I'm happy to say that production of the checklists is now almost entirely automatic with very little manual work required -- and it only took me ten years to finally make that happen with the first automated release in 2005!

There are two major tasks involved in the production of checklists. The first and most important is collecting the data that represents the basis of any checklist -- i.e. when birds come and go and how common they are, essentially their status and abundance. The second, not quite as difficult nor as time consuming (but still of major importance), is the task of converting the data into a format that is as useful as possible given the (physically) small size of typical checklists. So many checklists fall way short of this goal (in fact, sometimes it's not very clear what their goal really is).

My first step was to write software to generate bar graphs so that I could easily understand the data I was gathering on a daily basis. No point just sticking it into the computer if you can't see it in a way that's really useful. As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. There wasn't (still isn't) any commercial software to do this so I rolled my own in 1997.

This was all well and good but, as a data source, these real-world bar graphs suffer from two obvious problems. Holes, 4000 holes in Blackburn, Lancashire (showing my age now). No matter how much data I gather, there'll always be holes because of insufficient visits. Also, these raw bar graphs represent the actual chances of seeing a bird rather than true abundance (i.e. the thickness of the lines is proportional to the ratio of my sightings versus visits). While this is infinitely useful in deciding where to go to target a bird (I can automatically generate itineraries based on this data), it's not the way that data is presented in most checklists.

The next step was to write more software, this time a "bar graph editor", which I did in 2000. This was another component that I couldn't buy (at least not in a useable format). Now I could smooth out the holes and normalize the data to create standard bar graphs that represent actual abundance (or at least my interpretation of abundance).

After years of mulling it over, I began writing the software for the final piece of the puzzle towards the end of 2004. This was a "Checklist Generator" that reads standardized bar graphs and spits out data in a format suitable for creating HTML or WORD documents. There was a lot of work involved but now I can easily react to changes in taxonomy and changes in status and abundance by simply modifying the source data (i.e. the bar graph) and update a checklist very quickly.

Where's the beef (data)?

I liken that first ten years of effort to making sausages -- you throw all the ingredients into the hopper, crank the handle for a while (all the time trying not to think too much about what's in there) and finally, out pops a sausage. After the first, all the rest are easy!

Obviously, even many years worth of personal data from limited locations is of very little significance in the grand scheme of things. Consequently, in producing the monthly checklists I have relied extensively on published data in addition to my own data. I have used the bar graphs in the two SE AZ birdfinding guides (where there is much conflicting data) and other sources including "The Birds of Arizona", "Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Arizona" and internet reports.

My own data comes into play by giving perspective to all the other data. One can argue interminably about *actual* abundance levels and, as intimated above, there are many differences of opinion or interpretation on this. One person's common is another's fairly common and so on. However, the *relative* abundance of birds (in proper habitat) is much easier to discern and quantify. Therefore, I mostly use my data to "scale" abundances versus published data where I believe it to be misleading. Also, I use my own data to more accurately determine when changes in abundance occur -- i.e. when birds arrive, depart and pass through in migration.

Status and Abundance

Although the checklists are primarily designed to show which species are present (and their abundance) in a specific month, I've also attempted to show the overall status of each species. Obviously, the abundance codes for most species vary from month to month. However, the status information does not change. A typical checklist descriptor might look like the following from the April checklist.

[ ]W **Green-winged Teal*.....cLr

Due to space considerations, status information is necessarily terse. Nevertheless, if you understand the method behind my madness (outlined below) you should be able to get maximum use out of the checklists.

Status

There are two components to the status information:

1. A series of up to three characters following the checkbox.
2. Emphasis of the species name (either italicized or underlined).

Generally, I only attempt to show the primary status (either explicitly or implied) and the transient status, if any. Any one status component or both of the above status components may be used.

Status Characters

SP, S, F, W are used to indicate Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter.
N is used to indicate nesting.
***** indicates that the species is possible all year which does not necessarily mean that the species is a permanent resident. Although such species can potentially be found in any month, they are not necessarily in the same habitat, abundance or even the same individuals. Note that seasons can be protracted beyond the calendar meanings, especially for "fall" shorebirds (July - November) and "wintering" ducks (August - May).

For the letter codes, both upper and lower case are used. Upper case is used to convey seasonal occurrence with a high degree of regularity. Lower case is used to convey a degree of irregularity (such as an occasional visitor) or a slight preference for a season. For example, for a transient shorebird "f" means somewhat more common in fall whereas "F" would mean markedly more common in fall. For nesting status, "N" means regular nesting species whereas "n" means has nested or is an occasional nesting species.

Name Emphasis

Underlined names indicate species with localized range.
Italicized names indicate species that have transient status (either stand-alone such as migrant shorebirds, or in addition to other status such as a summer nesting species that is also a migrant). Transient status is not shown for a species that only has casual transient status compared to its main summer or winter status.

Status examples:

Wn* *Redhead*.....	Predominantly a winter bird that is possible all year, nesting occasionally. Also a transient.
N Mississippi Kite...	Implied summer resident (regular nester, not present all year). No significant transient status.
F *Baird's Sandpiper*..	Transient, regularly more common in fall
Willet	Transient, same abundance spring and fall (note no status characters)
s Little Blue Heron..	Irregular visitor, mostly in summer.
N* Cactus Wren.....	Implied permanent resident (regular nester, present all year). No transient status.

Although it's perhaps not as concise nor as elegant as Spanish grammar, and almost as complicated as German grammar, you can hopefully figure it out.

Abundance

It's important to realize the difference between actual abundance and your chances of finding a bird. First time visitors to southeast Arizona will undoubtedly feel that many species are less common than any published data source, not just my checklists. For example, although Whiskered Screech-Owl is a common and mostly sedentary permanent resident whose numbers don't vary throughout the year, you have a far greater chance to locate (and see) one during the breeding season than in winter.

Furthermore, abundance is only relevant when you are in proper habitat (if you are where they ain't then all bets are off!). This is especially true for species with localized range. A good example of this is provided by Buff-breasted Flycatcher, a bird that is common in Sawmill Canyon and parts of Carr Canyon and not present as little as 1/4 mile away from these specific locations.

Obviously, the range of the checklist is also important. Species that are almost impossible to find in southeast Arizona may be relatively easy to find not too far north (Le Conte's Thrasher, for example).

I define 6 levels of abundance with lower case abundance codes. The following examples should give you an idea of my sense of abundance.

Abundance	**Examples in proper habitat and season**
i irregular or very rare	irregular - ducks in summer, early migrants very rare - Flame-colored Tanager
r rare	Five-striped Sparrow, Hammond's Flycatcher in winter
u uncommon	Spotted Owl, Montezuma Quail
f fairly common	Elegant Trogon, Arizona Woodpecker, Hepatic Tanager
c common	White-winged Dove, Gila Woodpecker, Mexican Jay
a abundant	N. Shoveler in winter, Mourning Dove, House Finch

Note the dual use of "i" -- irregular and very rare which should be apparent from the context. For example, "i" is used define the abundance of American Wigeon in summer (possible lingering non breeding individuals); Orange-crowned Warbler and Ruby-crowned Kinglet in summer (both are potential nesters in a relatively underbirded area of southeast Arizona); and Lucy's Warbler in early March on the leading edge of its arrival (explodes to common by mid month). Do not confuse abundance code "i" with upper case abundance modifier "I" which is described in the following section.

Abundance Modifiers

Abundance codes can be preceded by several modifiers:

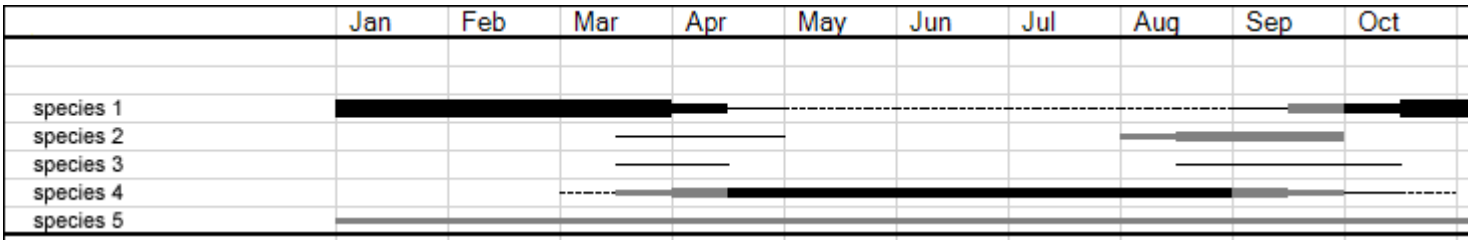
I - indicates a true irruptive species (or a species that varies significantly in numbers from year to year).
E -- indicates the early part of the month (roughly the first half, 1-15).
L - indicates the latter part of the month (roughly the second half, 16-31).

Modifier **I** is used to flag traditionally irruptive species such as Clark's Nutcracker and Pinyon Jay (generally all or nothing) as well as species such as Mountain Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Lawrence's Goldfinch and Cassin's Finch that can be highly variable in numbers from year to year. In such cases, the abundance level following "I" is the highest possible. e.g. "Iu" means uncommon in years when present and anywhere down to nothing in other years.

The **E** and **L** modifiers increase the usefulness of the checklist by providing a means to present data in approximate two week increments instead of the whole month. When looking at any individual monthly checklist, for any species that shows a change of abundance during the month you can tell the direction of travel (arriving or departing) depending on whether the abundance is increasing or decreasing as the month progresses.

Examples (see the following bar graph and checklist fragments):

Er means rare early in the month, absent later.
Lr means rare later in the month, absent earlier.
fLu means fairly common early in the month, uncommon later.



March	June	September	October
Wn* species 1.....a	i	.....rLf	.....cLa
F *species 2*.....Lr		.....f	
species 3.....Lr		.....r	.....Er
N species 4.....iLu	c	.....fLu	.....rLi
N* species 5.....u	.....u	.....u	.....u

Excluded Species

The January 2011 release of the SE AZ monthly checklists contain a total of 391 species. A checklist for any given month will contain less than this total. October is the highest species count month.

To keep the size of the checklists to two pages and to avoid including misleading information, I have deliberately excluded many species for a variety of reasons. Generally, I exclude species with insufficient records to warrant inclusion as a regular species (~20 give or take).

The following list of species have all occurred in southeast Arizona but are not included on any monthly checklist. Furthermore, hypothetical, released, undocumented and unaccepted species and species with very old records are excluded and not mentioned here.

Fulvous Whistling-Duck
Brant
Trumpeter Swan
Gargany
Harlequin Duck
White-winged Scoter
Black Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Barrow's Goldeneye
Pacific Loon
Least Storm-Petrel
Red-billed Tropicbird
Magnificent Frigatebird
Anhinga
Magnificent Frigatebird
Reddish Egret
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
Wood Stork
White Ibis
Glossy Ibis
Roseate Spoonbill
Swallow-tailed Kite
Red-shouldered Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Northern Jacana
Pacific Golden-Plover
Upland Sandpiper
Hudsonian Godwit
Ruddy Turnstone
Red Knot
White-rumped Sandpiper
Ruff
Parasitic Jaeger
Long-tailed Jaeger
Laughing Gull
American Herring Gull
Western Gull
Black-legged Kittiwake
Gull-billed Tern
Caspian Tern
Elegant Tern
Arctic Tern
Black Skimmer
Black-billed Cuckoo
Chimney Swift
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-breasted Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Nutting's Flycatcher
Great Kiskadee
Northern Shrike
White-eyed Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Philadelphia Vireo
Yellow-green Vireo
Blue Jay
Cave Swallow
Bohemian Waxwing
Carolina Wren
Northern Wheatear
Wood Thrush
Blue Mockingbird
Bohemian Waxwing
Blue-winged Warbler
Golden-winged Warbler
Crescent-chested Warbler
Tropical Parula
Magnolia Warbler
Cape May Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Blackburnian Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Pine Warbler
Prairie Warbler
Bay-breasted Warbler
Blackpoll Warbler
Cerulean Warbler
Swainson's Warbler
Connecticut Warbler
Mourning Warbler
Canada Warbler
Slate-throated Redstart
Fan-tailed Warbler
Scarlet Tanager
Eastern Towhee
Field Sparrow
Le Conte's Sparrow
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow
Lapland Longspur
Snow Bunting
Rusty Blackbird
Common Grackle
Black-vented Oriole
Pine Grosbeak