

PASSERIFORMES

(Songbirds)

Corvids



Family **CORVIDAE** (Jays)

Woodhouse's Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*)



Cerbat Range; Chloride, AZ



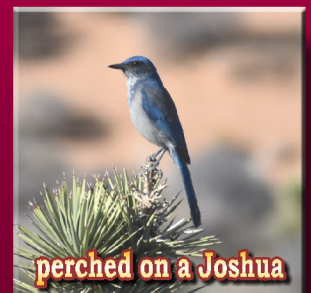
Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



South Rim; Grand Canyon National Park; AZ



Cerbat Range; Chloride, AZ



Red Rock Canyon NCA; NV

Measurements:

Length: 4" Wing Span: 6" Average Weight: 2 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; blue overall with gray back, grayish undersides; gray cheeks and white throat with blue "necklace" (indistinct and incomplete); stout black bill; long tail; whitish streak above dark eyes; no sexual dimorphism

Notes:

common; social in small groups; occurs in brushy areas to open oak-juniper woodlands of inland w NA from se OR southwestward to TX, and south through MEX; 5 subspecies; feeds mainly on seeds, insects, fruit, etc.

Mojave presence: year-round

Comments:

Originally, various subspecies were lumped together as the **Western Scrub Jay**, but are now separated into individual species. For instance, what was designated as the "Pacific form" of the Western is now called the **California Scrub Jay** (*Aphelocoma californica*), and the Woodhouse was considered the "inland form." While essentially identical in plumage, each can be differentiated today by range--the California relegated to coastal habitats, and the Woodhouse occurring inland, thus making identification much more straightforward. The individuals pictured here were all photographed in various months throughout the year.

Family **CORVIDAE** (Jays)

Stellar's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)



white forehead stripes

Kaibab Lake; Williams, AZ



prominent crest

Kaibab Lake; Williams, AZ



gathering nesting stuff

Kaibab Lake; Williams, AZ



Kaibab Lake; Williams, AZ

Measurements:

Length: 11" Wing Span: 19" Average Weight: 3.5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; dark blue wings, rump, tail, paler belly; brown-black back, head, neck, crest; two vertical stripes on forehead (blue or white depending on subspecies); short, conical black bill; somewhat long tail; both genders similar

Notes:

uncommon; pairs or small groups; generally prefers higher-elevation woodlands in western NA (excluding most of the Great Basin) from AK south along the Pacific coast and southeast through the Rockies and Colorado Plateau Province into MEX; up to 16 subspecies; feeds mainly on seeds, fruit, and insects

Mojave presence: rare; far eastern region (se NV, sw UT, nw AZ)

Comments:

While common where you do see them, stellars are actually seldom encountered, especially when compared to their relatives, pinyon and scrub jays. However, they can occasionally be seen on Mt Charleston in the **Spring Mountains NRA** west of Las Vegas, usually foraging for scraps of food in campgrounds! Even if you don't encounter these birds, this area is a great place to escape the heat of the desert below and see numerous other wildlife, so a visit is well worth the time and effort.

Family **CORVIDAE** (Jays)

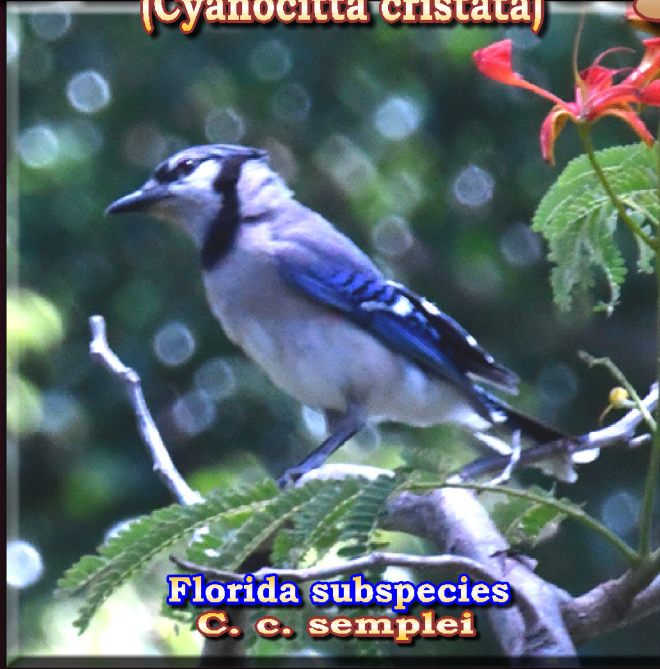
Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*)



Mills Pond; Pompano Bch, FL



Mills Pond; Pompano Bch, FL



Palm Aire; Pompano Beach, Florida



Palm Aire; Pompano Bch, FL



Pompano Beach, FL

Measurements:

Length: 11" Wing Span: 15" Average Weight: 3 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; blue wings, tail, crest; paler blue back; white face; gray-white undersides; black "necklace"; black bill, eyes, legs; white wing bar, tips of secondaries and tail; little sexual dimorphism (male slightly larger)

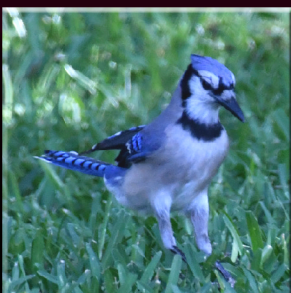
Notes:

uncommon; social, sometimes migrating in large flocks; prefers rural and urban woodlands throughout eastern NA from CAN south to the Gulf states, and the Atlantic coast west to the Rockies (very rare farther west); 4 subspecies; omnivorous, but prefers nuts and seeds (especially acorns), occasionally insects, fruit, etc.

Mojave presence: very rare

Comments:

Growing up in Maryland provided me the opportunity to become familiar with this beautiful bird. Since it is not a common species, sighting one was always captivating. However, I have never seen one in the Mojave region, though sightings of rare vagrants have occasionally been made. All the birds shown here are from South Florida in May of 2021.



Family **CORVIDAE** (Jays)

Pinyon Jay

(*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*)



bluish gray overall

Desert NWR; Nevada



evening pose

Desert NWR; Nevada



**flying over
typical habitat**

Desert NWR; Nevada

Measurements:

Length: 10" Wing Span: 19" Average Weight: 3.5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; grayish blue overall (bluer on head; paler undersides) without distinct contrasting markings; whitish throat; black bill, legs, eyes; somewhat short tail; both genders similar

Notes:

uncommon; gregarious; favors middle- to high-elevation open forests (pinyon-juniper to ponderosa woodlands) in western NA from MT south to n MEX, and CA east to NM (rare elsewhere); sole member of the genus; feeds primarily on seeds (especially pinyon and ponderosa), also juniper berries, insects, spiders, etc.

Mojave presence: year-round

Comments:

These elusive jays generally reside in higher-elevation woodlands away from mass human exposure; thus are far less habituated to people than other jays. Consequently, they are far more wary. They usually stay hidden in the trees, darting quickly from one to another, making it a challenge to get good photographs of them; such as the two shown above in the [Desert National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Southern Nevada.

At a distance they can be mistaken for scrub jays, but a closer inspection reveals a grayer overall body, and no white eyeline.

Family CORVIDAE (Jays)

Gray Jay

(*Cyanocitta cristata*)



Maroon Bells; Aspen, CO



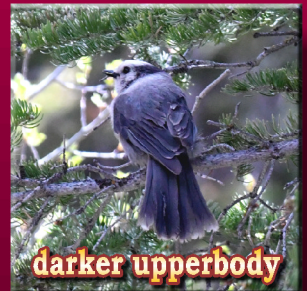
Maroon Bells; Aspen, CO



Maroon Bells; Aspen, CO



Maroon Bells; Aspen, CO



Maroon Bells; Aspen, CO

Measurements:

Length: 11" Wing Span: 18" Average Weight: 2.5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; gray overall with paler undersides; dark crown on **Taiga** form, mostly white on **Rocky Mountain** form; small black bill; somewhat long tail with whitish tip; dark eyes; both genders similar

Notes:

uncommon; small groups; prefers coniferous woodlands from AK south through the Rockies and adjacent areas to AZ, and coast to coast throughout sub-Arctic CAN; feeds mainly on seeds, fruit, insects

Mojave presence: rare (sw UT)

Comments:

The only time I know that I saw this species was during a June, 2021, visit to the **Maroon Bells Scenic Area** near Aspen, Colorado. In my years as strictly a geologist, I wasn't so intuned to wildlife I encountered. So it's possible I had seen one of these uncommon birds before, and just didn't appreciate it! But probably not. At first, I mistook it for the somewhat similar **Clark's Nurcracker**, which I had seen several times in the Spring Mountains near Las Vegas, but not at close range. This bird made its noisy appearance at close distance, affording me the opportunity to get good shots. It wasn't until I saw the photos on the computer, and did a little research, that I discovered I had encountered a new species for my Life List!

Family **CORVIDAE** (Crows)

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)



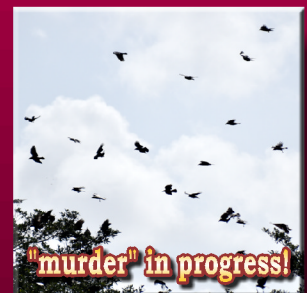
Ocala, Florida



Pompano Beach, Florida



Pompano Beach, Florida



Pompano Beach, Florida

Pompano Beach, Florida

Measurements:

Length: 18" Wing Span: 36" Average Weight: 1 lb

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-large size; completely black (plumage, bill, eyes, feet) with glossy feathers; heavy, down-curved bill; short tail squared at tip, wedge-shaped in flight; males slightly larger than females, otherwise no sexual dimorphism

Notes:

common; gregarious; widespread in almost any environment throughout NA except tundra; up to 5 subspecies; flock called a "murder"; omnivorous (extremely diverse and opportunistic diet)

Mojave presence: rare; winter range

Comments:

Crows are uncommon in the Mojave, a region dominated instead by the much larger **Common Raven**. When present, they can best be distinguished from their cousins by size (smaller), body form (more slender and less shaggy), and flight characteristics (direct with regular wingbeats and only short glides). While the less-stout bill, smaller and broader wings, and raucous call also define the differences between the two species, these traits are difficult to determine in the field, especially from a distance. In all fairness, if you're in the desert and unsure of the identification, "Raven" will be correct almost every time!

Family **CORVIDAE** (Crows)

Clark's Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*)



Lee Cyn; Spring Mtns; NV



Lee Canyon; Spring Mountains NRA; Nevada



Lee Cyn; Spring Mtns; NV



Lee Cyn; Spring Mtns; NV



Lee Cyn; Spring Mtns; NV

Measurements:

Length: 11" Wing Span: 24" Average Weight: 4.5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; light gray overall; black wings with white secondaries; black tail with white outer feathers; straight, pointy black bill; black legs and feet; dark eyes with white eyering; white face and chin; no sexual dimorphism

Notes:

uncommon; solitary to small groups; found in mature high-elevation woodlands in w NA from British Columbia south to NM (very rare vagrants eastward); aka **Clark's Crow**, **Woodpecker Crow**; feeds mainly on seeds of various pines

Mojave presence: year-round

Comments:

These attractive birds are uncommon throughout their range, but especially so in the Mojave region. Though probably more widespread, the only place I've encountered them is along the Bristlecone Trail near the head of Lee Canyon in the **Spring Mountain National Recreation Area** in Southern Nevada. If you visit the area, don't expect to see one, but the hike through the high elevations of the range is relatively easy and well worth the time and effort. Even if unlikely to see this nutcracker, keep an eye out for the very rare, but more prevalent **Palmer's Chipmunk**, endemic solely to the Spring Mountains (described in the "Mammals" section of this website)!

Family **CORVIDAE** (Crows)

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)



enjoying a great view

Hualapai Reservation; AZ



all black
plumage

Spirit Mountain; Nevada



western subspecies
C. c. sinuatus

Hualapai Reservation; West Rim; Grand Canyon; AZ



eating a tasty frog

Corn Creek; Desert NWR



strolling on the beach

Twin Lakes; Mt Elbert; CO

Measurements:

Length: 25" Wing Span: 53" Average Weight: 2.5 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; completely black (plumage, bill, eyes, feet) with glossy feathers; shaggy neck feathers; heavy, down-curved bill; long tail, wedge-shaped in flight; males slightly larger than females, otherwise no sexual dimorphism

Notes:

common; solitary to gregarious; at home in numerous habitats from urban areas to deserts (even Death Valley!) and high-elevation forests throughout w NA, most of CAN, south into MEX, and across Europe, Asia, and North Africa; up to 11 subspecies; omnivorous and opportunistic, eating just about anything, including carrion

Mojave presence: year-round

Comments:

Ravens are common residents of the Mojave. Similar to the **American Crow**, but larger, ravens are easy to identify. Almost as large as **Red-Tailed Hawks**, they are often seen escorting such intruders out of their territory in a jet-squadron-like fashion (left). Ravens are also very intelligent, and it's been claimed they remember those who have mistreated them. True or not, why take the risk of incurring their wrath?



Red Rock Cyn NRA; NV

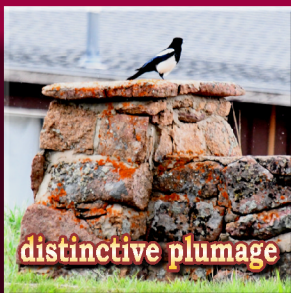
Family **CORVIDAE** (Magpies)

Black-Billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*)



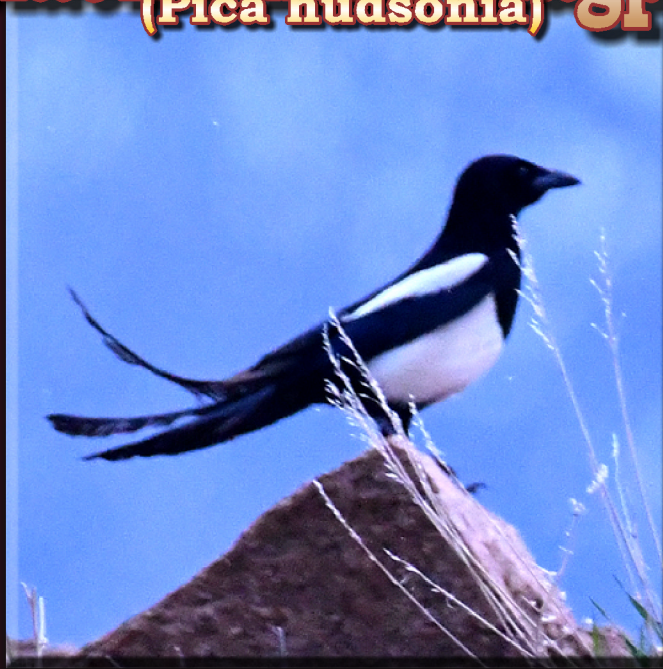
foraging on the ground

Black Cyn of the Gunnison NP



distinctive plumage

Lily Lake; RMNP; CO



near Lily Lake; Rocky Mountain NP; CO



white primaries, shoulders

Yellowstone NP; Wyoming



obeying the speed limit!

Yellowstone NP; Wyoming

Measurements:

Length: 21" Wing Span: 20" Average Weight: 5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-large size; black back, tail, head, and breast with white belly and scapulas (shoulders); very long tail (diamond-shaped in flight); black, slightly curved bill, eyes; black wings with blue-green iridescence, white primaries with black tips; males larger than females, otherwise both genders share identical plumage

Notes:

common; social in small groups; prefers open habitats (prairies, fields, farms, etc.) of western NA from AK south through CAN to NV/AZ/NM, and inland WA/OR/CA east to Great Plains (rare as far east as OH); aka **American Magpie**; omnivorous and opportunistic, foraging mainly on the ground for seeds, insects, nuts, berries, carrion, etc.

Comments:

Though common throughout their range, these magpies are rare in the Mojave. Occasional sightings are made in the far northeast portion of the region, such as at the **Pahranagat National Wildlife Refuge** near Alamo, Nevada. The only magpies I have personally encountered were in/near **Yellowstone NP** (9/19) and **Rocky Mountain NP** (6/21) shown above, and in the **Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP** (6/21) at right.

