

PASSERIFORMES

(Songbirds)

Nuthatches



Family **SITTIDAE** (Nuthatches)

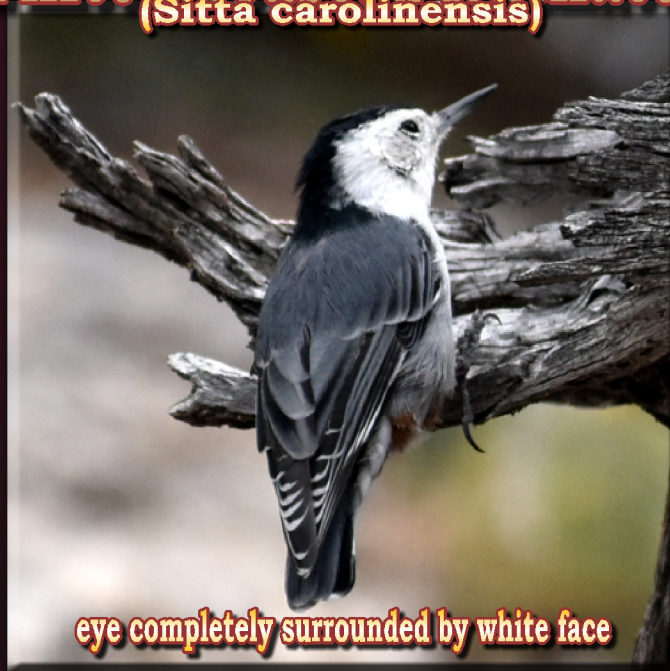
White-Breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*)



South Rim; Grand Cyn NP



South Rim; Grand Cyn NP



Desert View Overlook; Spring Mountains NRA; NV



South Rim; Grand Cyn NP



South Rim; Grand Cyn NP

Measurements:

Length: 5.5" Wing Span: 10" Average Weight: .75 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-small size, large head; blue-gray back and wings, darker cap that extends down nape to band on back; white face, throat, undersides with rusty stain near rear; short, black tail with white diagonal bands; long, pointed, slightly upcurved, two-toned (black-gray) bill; **dark eyes completely surrounded by white**; **(m)** bold white undersides; black cap; **(f)** gray cap (a few actually have black!); thinner band on back; duller undersides with paler rust near rear

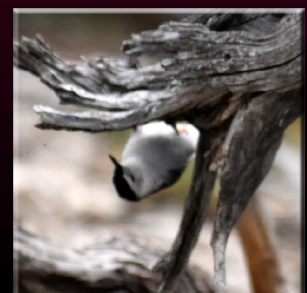
Notes:

common; territorial, solitary or monogamous; inhabits montane woodlands (usually deciduous) throughout most of US, s CAN, and c MEX; largest of the nuthatches; 9 subspecies; eats insects in summer, mostly seeds in winter

Mojave presence: rare; year-round in some "sky islands"

Comments:

These active, agile, and noisy little birds (reminiscent of tiny "woodland penguins") characteristically forage upside-down looking for insects hidden under the tree's bark, as demonstrated by this fellow in the [Spring Mountains National Recreation Area](#) west of Las Vegas (one of the few places to find this nuthatch in the Mojave region) in September, 2018.



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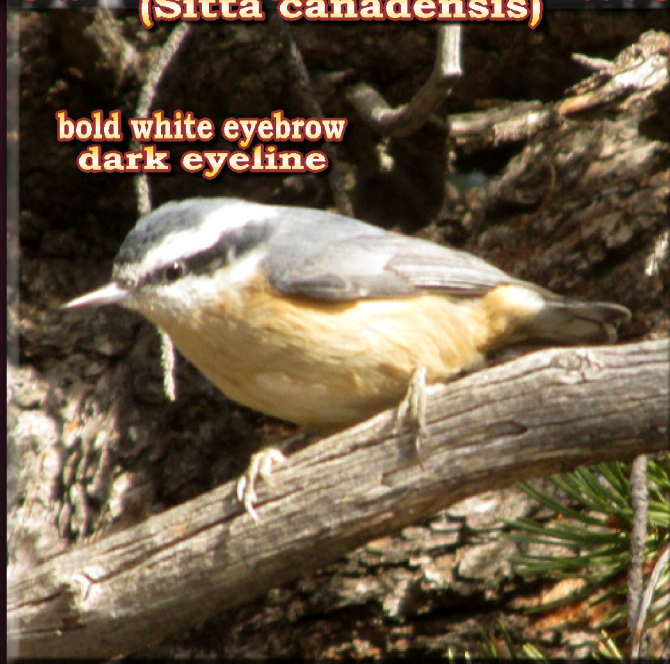
Red-Breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*)



Corn Creek; Desert NWR



Corn Creek; Desert NWR



South Rim; Grand Canyon National Park; AZ



South Rim; Grand Cyn NP



South Rim; Grand Cyn NP

Measurements:

Length: 4.5" Wing Span: 8" Average Weight: .4 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; blue-gray upperparts, rusty underparts, black cap; short tail; long, pointed, slightly upcurved, gray bill; dark eyes in black eyeline; white eyebrow; little sexual dimorphism (females have duller cap and are paler below)

Notes:

common locally; usually solitary, pairs are monogamous; inhabits higher-elevation woodlands (mainly coniferous) throughout sub-Arctic CAN and US; uses pine resin to line nest cavity opening, ostensibly to protect against predators; eats insects in summer, seeds (particularly pinion) in winter

Mojave presence: winter range

Comments:

Named for their habit of wedging seeds into crevices, then "hatching" them open with their sharp bills, all nuthatches are acrobatic foragers. Without using their tails as a prop (the way woodpeckers do), they characteristically hunt upside-down and every-which-way for insects hidden under the bark of trees. Its amusing to watch them casually walk on the underside of branches, as if gravity was working the wrong way!

Family **SITTIDAE** (Nuthatches)

Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*)



South Rim; Grand Cyn NP



South Rim; Grand Canyon National Park; AZ



South Rim; Grand Cyn NP

Measurements:

Length: 4" Wing Span: 7" Average Weight: .3 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

tiny size; steel-gray above, buffy white below, brownish-gray head, pale spot on nape; short, square tail with white patches at base; pointed, straight, dark bill; **dark eyes in black eyeline, completely surrounded by gray**

Notes:

common locally; gregarious; found in coniferous woodlands (primarily **Ponderosa Pine**) in isolated populations spread discontinuously throughout w NA from s British Columbia, CAN, south to c MEX; smallest nuthatch; 6 subspecies; forages acrobatically on tree trunks for insects in summer, seeds in winter

Mojave presence: rare; year-round

Comments:

This tiny nuthatch is just as active and agile as its larger brethren, probing in any which-way positions for insects hiding under treebark. The main difference is that the Pygmy is known to be more social, seen not only in small flocks of its own species, but also foraging for food with others that share its habitat, such as chickadees and titmice. However, the only specimen I have thus far seen and photographed, at **Grand Canyon NP** in August, 2018 (above), was checking me out all by himself. Pygmy nuthatches are rare in the Mojave region, although they can be found in the **Spring Mountains NRA** west of Las Vegas.