

PASSERIFORMES

(Songbirds)

Cardinals



Family CARDINALIDAE (Cardinals)

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)



Santos Recreation Area; FL



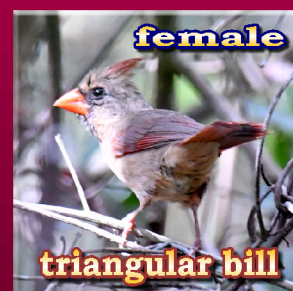
Long Pine Key; ENP



Long Pine Key; Everglades National Park; FL



Mohogany Hammock; ENP



Mohogany Hammock; ENP

Measurements:

Length: 8.5" Wing Span: 11" Average Weight: 1.6 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; prominent crest; large conical bill; dark eyes; (m) overall bright red plumage; black facemask and neck; red bill; (f) olive with red tint on wings, crest, tail; red-orange bill; grayer, less-defined facemask; slightly smaller size

Notes:

common; in pairs or small groups; inhabits woodlands, wetlands, urban areas, etc., mainly throughout eastern NA, extending west to AZ (rarely in isolated locations farther west and into CA), and south into Central America; 19 sub-species; aka **Cardinal**, **Redbird**, etc.; forages on ground primarily for seeds, grains, and fruit, but will also take insects, snails, etc.

Mojave presence: rare vagrant

Comments:

Growing up in Baltimore where this bird is common (but not prodigious), I came to favor the cardinal for its vibrant red plumage--red being my favorite color. I include it here, because sightings have been recorded in the far southeastern portion and isolated spots elsewhere in the Mojave, though I have yet to personally see one here. It is one of the birds I am particularly anxious to photograph in the Mojave Desert. A most likely site would be the [Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve](#).

Pca2

Family CARDINALIDAE (Grosbeaks)

Black-Headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)



Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV

Corn Creek; Desert National Wildlife Refuge; NV

Measurements:

Length: 8" Wing Span: 12" Average Weight: 1.5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; large, two-toned grayish conical bill; dark eyes; (m) black head, face, upperbody; white patches on wings; orange breast and paler belly; (f) brown upperbody with white wingbars; paler orange or buff breast, sometimes with brown streaks; white stripe down center of head, on cheek, and distinct white eyeline

Notes:

relatively common; mostly solitary; found in woodlands, thickets, urban areas, etc., mainly in w NA from s CAN south to MEX (rarer as far north as AK and east throughout rest of NA); easily confused with **Rose-Breasted Grosbeak** (especially the female) with which it often hybridizes where ranges overlap; feeds on seeds, fruit, insects

Mojave presence: migratory

Comments:

Though a common species overall, visitors to the Mojave are not nearly so. I have only encountered these birds a couple of times. The male can be mistaken for a **Baltimore Oriole**, especially where their ranges overlap. Corn Creek within the **Desert NWR** north of Las Vegas is a promising place to see one, though **Blue Grosbeaks** are far more numerous there. Other classic locations in the Las Vegas area include the **Clark County Wetlands Park** and the **Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve**.

Family CARDINALIDAE (Grosbeaks)

Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*)



Clark Co. Wetlands Park; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR



Clark County Wetlands Park; Southern Nevada



Corn Creek; Desert NWR



Corn Creek; Desert NWR

Measurements:

Length: 7" Wing Span: 11" Average Weight: 1 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; large, two-toned, silver-gray conical bill; two wingbars; dark eyes; (m) dark blue overall; distinct, chestnut wingbars; small crest; (f) buffy brown overall; tan wingbars; pale breast and belly; blue tint on wings

Notes:

uncommon; gregarious; widespread in shrubby fields to open woodlands in the Great Plains and across southern half of US, south into MEX and Caribbean; 7 subspecies; most closely related to **Lazuli Bunting**; forages primarily on the ground for insects, but also takes other invertebrates, seeds, fruit, etc.

Mojave presence: summer range

Comments:

Though an uncommon species, these beautiful birds are rather reliable visitors to Corn Creek in the **Desert NWR**. Though hard to approach, they can be great posers when they want to be, like these females (left) and juvenile (right) who are far more photogenic than their male counterparts who are just too macho for such things!



Family CARDINALIDAE (NA Buntings)

Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*)



Willow Spring; RRCNCA; NV



Theodore Roosevelt NP; ND



Willow Spring; Red Rock Canyon NCA; NV



Measurements:

Length: 5.5" Wing Span: 8.5" Average Weight: .5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; dark eyes and conical bill; (**breeding m**) vibrant blue head, rump, tail; dull orangish breast; white belly (non-breeding male mottled tan/blue upperparts); distinct, white wingbars; (**f**) light brown overall, pale belly and unstreaked cinnamon breast; buffy wingbars; blue tints in wings and tail

Notes:

common, but elusive; found in brushy habitats of western NA from sw CAN south through MEX (occasionally in eastern NA); named for the gemstone "lapis lazuli"; forages on the ground or in bushes mainly for seeds and insects

Mojave presence: migratory

Comments:

Though considered common, actually seeing/recognizing one is a different matter. Breeding males are easily confused with the very similar **Western Bluebird** (short, thin bill; no wingbars); from a distance females can be mistaken for the female **Indigo Bunting** and many female sparrow species. Range can be a good guide, but the best is association with males. I have only conclusively seen a few of these buntings (all males) since I began photographing wildlife. That should give you a sense of how uncommon it is to encounter these "common" birds! (Note: **emberizine** buntings are "Old World" sparrow-like birds)

Family CARDINALIDAE (Tanagers)

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)



Corn Creek; Desert NWR



Bosque del Apache NWR; NM



Willow Spring; Red Rock Canyon NCA; NV



Peach Springs, AZ



Desert Pass; Desert NWR

Measurements:

Length: 7" Wing Span: 11" Average Weight: 1 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; 2 wingbars; conical bill; dark eyes; forked tail; (**breeding m**) **yellow body**, **red head**; black wings with 1 yellow, 1 white wingbar; black bill; (**f**) green-yellow overall; gray wings with pale wingbars; dusky bill

Notes:

common; solitary; prefers woodlands (deciduous/coniferous) throughout w NA from Pacific coast east to mid Great Plains, and nw CAN south to winter in MEX and Central America; formerly in family **Thraupidae**; eats insects, fruit

Mojave presence: migratory

Comments:



This is the first photograph I ever got of a tanager, and it's still one of my most amazing--purely lucky--shots! I was aiming at something else off to the left, caught a glimpse of color to my right, turned and took the pic (left), then returned my attention back to my original interest. I had no idea what I shot until I got home. When I zoomed in on the computer, I discovered my great fortune (right). And it was in focus!



Pca6

Family CARDINALIDAE (Tanagers)

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)



Mammoth Cave NP; KY



Mammoth Cave NP; KY



Mammoth Cave National Park; Kentucky



Measurements:

Length: 7" Wing Span: 12" Average Weight: 1 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; slight head crest (often not apparent); no wingbars; forked tail; stout, yellow/dusky bill; dark eyes; (m) **completely red overall**, darker wings; (f) olive yellow above, yellow below, with hints of orange; darker wings, tail

Notes:

common; solitary; inhabits open forests of s US from s CA east to mid-Atlantic states, wintering south to nw SA; formerly in family *Thraupidae*; 2 subspecies; forages high in trees mainly for bees, wasps, ants, etc., and fruit

Mojave presence: rare; summer range

Comments:

The only specimen of this species I have yet seen was at **Mammoth Cave National Park** in Kentucky, in May of 2021, chortling melodically high in the tree foliage (above left). When I finally spotted him, I at first thought he was a **Northern Cardinal**, but I've seen enough cardinals in my time to know something was different about this fellow. First, he was completely red overall (except for some white down under his wings; perhaps he was a juvenile), unlike the cardinal that has a black face and throat. He also lacked the distinctive crest of the cardinal. Most apparent, however, was his stout, conical, yellow bill--not cardinal-like at all. It wasn't until I got back home and did a little research did I discover his true identity. It's always a