

2023 GILA RIVER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT — *Linda Moore, Compiler*

The Gila River Christmas Bird Count was conducted on December 31, 2023. Twenty participants counted on 10 routes in spectacular weather. A total of 93 species were counted, with high numbers of Gambel's Quail at 650, Yellow-rumped Warblers at 52, and Great-tailed Grackles at 96. The most unusual species noted was a Lark Sparrow, not commonly seen this time of year.

The highlight for the count was a Crested Caracara that had been seen two days previous to the count, verified with a photograph. While not able to officially count the species as it was not seen on count day, it was reported as a 'count week' bird, putting it for the first time on the official CBC list for the area. Additional count week birds were Western Screech Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Turkey Vulture, and Crissal Thrasher, all of which have been seen on previous counts but are unusual.

Several species were notably few in number. Where 758 American Robins were counted in 2022, this year produced only 54. Sparrow species also seemed on the low side this year, although White-crowned Sparrows tried to make up for it with 936 counted. Still, that was a far cry from their historical high of 2253. This points to the importance of trends over time when looking at species numbers, rather than one survey. The Gila River CBC has been conducted most years since 1972 and can give a good indication of trends for various species, although the number and ability of participants and time spent counting are variables that should be taken into consideration. Total number of birds for 2023 is 4037.

A huge thank you to all the participants who came out and counted birds instead of starting an early New Year's celebration!