



## Arizona's Raptor Experience, LLC

June 2019

~Newsletter~

*Greetings from Chino Valley!*

*We hope you are well and staying cool in the summer heat. It's baby bird season and we've had lots of excitement around the house. A pair of Say's Phoebes nested under the eaves of our porch giving us a front row seat for watching them bring an endless number of insects to their two young all day long, every day! House Finches are nesting in the rafters of the bird mews and the Gambel's Quail have started showing up on the hill with the first hatchlings of the season.*

*This morning a day-old quail chick was separated from its mother and ended up on the back porch. All we could do was catch the little guy and put it up on the hill with the hopes it would find its mother. This experience reminded me of the many perils faced by baby birds, even before they hatch. This newsletter will focus on one of those perils...the threat of carnivorous birds.*

*We hope you enjoy it!*



*Young American Kestrel recently banded then returned to a nest box we put up as a part of the American Kestrel Partnership.*

***Birds of Prey...or are they? Not all carnivorous birds are built the same.***



*Greater Roadrunner*  
*P.Schnell photo*

To be classified as a bird of prey, or raptor, a bird must have powerful feet with talons for holding and killing prey and a hooked beak for killing prey and tearing/eating flesh. All birds of prey are considered carnivorous, or meat eaters, and they can be placed into categories based on the type of meat:

**Piscivores:** fish eating (ex: Bald Eagles, Osprey)

**Insectivores:** insect eating (ex: Swainson's Hawks, American Kestrels)

**Avivores:** bird eating (ex: Cooper's Hawk, Peregrine Falcon)

**Scavengers:** carrion eating (old world vultures – still classified as raptors)

However, **many** birds that are meat-eaters are **not** raptors. Roadrunners, Ravens, Crows, Jay's, Kingfishers, Storks, Heron's, Shrikes and Gulls are just a few examples.



*Say's Phoebe with a large insect in its mouth.*

Many songbird's, like the Say's Phoebe in our yard, are insectivores. But they are, again, different from raptors as they do not have the required characteristics.

So, why are some carnivorous birds, other than raptors, a threat to eggs and young birds? Because, of course, they eat them! Egg eating birds are also called Avivores.





### **Roadrunners**

Paul captured this fabulous photo of a Greater Roadrunner in our backyard with a mouse in its beak. Roadrunners will eat almost anything they can catch, including insects, scorpions,

snakes, lizards, and small birds, including nestlings and eggs. They have been known to catch birds at bird feeders and even to snatch hummingbirds out of the air. Roadrunners are very fast – they can reach 18 mph, allowing them to outrun prey like lizards. Large prey is usually held in the beak and beaten against rocks or branches until they are dead and to break the bones and elongate the prey to make it easier to swallow.

Roadrunners are a member of the cuckoo family. They are known for their ability to kill and eat poisonous creatures like scorpions and rattlesnakes. In fact, they are one of the few predators known to attack rattlesnakes. Roadrunner pairs will sometimes hunt them cooperatively, with one bird distracting the snake while the other moves in and pins its head. The snake's head is then beaten on a rock until the snake dies.

Roadrunners mate for life and their bonds are renewed each spring with food items offered by males to their mates. They make wonderful cooing sounds to call to each other – Paul and I thoroughly enjoy watching them and listening to them in our yard.

Roadrunners are not without predators of their own. Coyotes, for example, can outrun them and will readily take them as a meal. The oldest known Roadrunner was seven years old.

### **Common Ravens**

Another regular visitor to our yard is the Common Raven. This is not surprising as we often toss food that the raptors have left behind in their mews

on the back hill or put it on a post in the front yard – we love to watch the antics of the Raven's when they come to investigate these food tidbits. Ravens are actually omnivores, eating both meat and plant material. They readily consume carrion, but will also take eggs and nestlings, insects, mice, fish, pet food, garbage and just about any other kind of food!



*Common Raven*  
*P. Schnell photo*

When they visit our yard, the Ravens are never alone. We have a family group that visits about two times a day. Raven pairs defend their territory and try to exclude other Ravens year-round, so we see the same birds each time. They always check the yard for food scraps and stop at the bird bath for a drink. Although they are regular visitors, they remain skittish and ever watchful. They are also noisy! Communication among the group is very important and there is always a sentry watching for danger and sounding the alarm when necessary.

Ravens are just plain fun to watch. They are very clever and playful too. Young birds pick up anything new to investigate and determine its usefulness. Word to the wise – this includes those neat glowing stones you can buy to put in your garden. Somewhere, there's a Raven nest that glows beautifully at night!

Ravens and their Crow relatives are among the most intelligent of birds. They have demonstrated true insight when solving problems without having to rely on trial and error to obtain success. They are especially adept at learning where to find food. For example, Ravens are thought to follow female Cowbirds when they parasitize nests of other birds, laying and leaving their eggs behind. In addition, they have been documented following researchers setting up fake nests with eggs inside. In both cases, the eggs are located and readily consumed.

Ravens are classified as songbirds and are the largest in that group. They are Corvids - related to the Crows and Jays. Their most common predators are birds of prey, especially Great-horned Owls. The oldest Common Raven known was 22 years and 7 months old.

*It's that time of year when we need to really conserve water. Here's a tip: if you wash dishes in the sink, have an empty bottle nearby to collect all the cold water while you're waiting for the hot. Instead of going down the drain, that cold water can be used to water plants or fill bird baths!*



*Baby Western Screech Owls banded and returned to their nest box*



*Baby American Kestrels at one of the American Kestrel partnership nest boxes.*

