

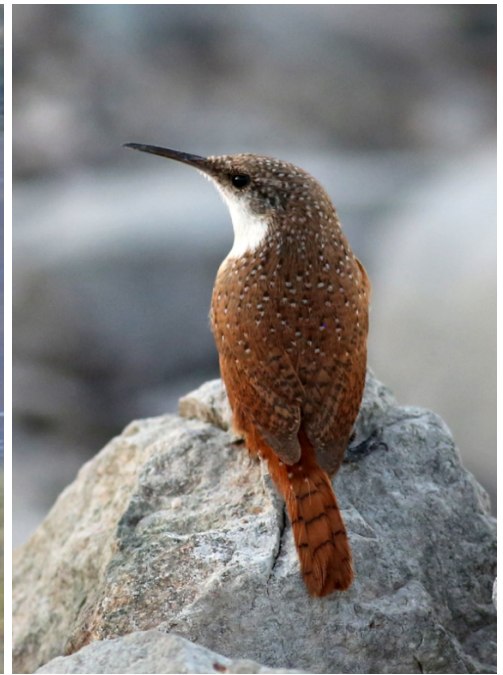
Alamo Lake & Santa Maria River (La Paz/Mohave Counties) 8-10 November 2019

By Anne Pellegrini, edited by Eric Hough



Overlook at the northern end of Alamo Lake (© Anne Pellegrini).

On 8–10 November 2019, seven participants explored the area around Alamo Lake and the confluence of the Big Sandy and Santa Maria rivers upstream of it in western Arizona. The area is bisected by the border of Mohave and La Paz counties. The reservoir transitions sharply to Sonoran Desert upland around most of the perimeter and borders a large expanse of native cottonwood-willow riparian forest at the north end of the lake. Further upstream on the Santa Maria and Big Sandy rivers, the vegetation transitions to wide swath of mixed native and exotic riparian vegetation, including salt-cedars (tamarisks). This riparian woodland is interspersed with and bounded by mesquite *bosque* (woodland) on the edges. The area is infrequently visited by birders, especially the Big Sandy River, and there is a corresponding lack of eBird data, especially in fall. The goal of this AZFO expedition was to explore as much of the area as possible, especially along both the Big Sandy and Santa Maria rivers, which are less readily accessed than the lake. Unfortunately, accessing the Big Sandy River was deemed too logistically difficult for this expedition's timeframe and number of participants available, so that river remains an area in need of future exploration.



Blue-footed Booby (© Janine McCabe), left; and **Canyon Wren**, right (© Marceline Vandewater).

Most of the group arrived on Friday afternoon (8 Nov.) searching the lake from several vantage points on the La Paz side. We attempted to find the vagrant **Blue-footed Booby** that had been relocated by Janine McCabe earlier in the morning, but were unsuccessful this afternoon. Janine arrived the day before (7 Nov.) and had a few species not found during the rest of the weekend, including a flock of **Black-necked Stilts**. The majority of birds identified on the lake were *Aechmophorus grebes* (**Western/Clark's**), with counts within range of previous high counts from the lake. While no unusual species were observed, the group was happy to see a pair of **Hooded Mergansers** and a flock of **Red-breasted Mergansers** near Alamo Lake dam. That evening, we attempted to look for nightjars and owls, but came up empty, though two **Great Horned Owls** were heard in the early hours from the campsite.



Eared Grebes at Alamo Lake (© Janine McCabe).

Saturday (9 Nov.) morning began with a trip to the Santa Maria River. It was so incredibly quiet! At first, it seemed like the birds were slow to wake up, but activity remained incredibly slow all morning. Our group split in two, with one heading upriver and one heading downriver from the Date Creek inflow. Neither group encountered standing water, just extensive stretches of sand. Highlights were a late **Plumbeous Vireo** and a couple **Northern Cardinals**, the latter of which is a rare and local resident in western Arizona.



Riparian habitat at the north end of Alamo Lake (© Anne Pellegrini).

After the Santa Maria River, we headed back to camp for lunch, then hit the lake for another attempt at the **Blue-footed Booby**. This time, we were successful! We ultimately located a good vantage point northeast of the booby's perch in the lake, which was above the very southern extent of native riparian forest at the north end of the lake. While scanning the lake from this vantage point, we noted how much more abundant the passerines were, even though we were well above the trees. There were actually full flocks of **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, which included one **Myrtle** form of this species. In comparison, we all had to work hard to find even one warbler earlier in the morning on the Santa Maria River. The lake was considerably shallower at the northern end, with a significant amount of emergent dead, woody vegetation. We noted several dabbling duck species as well as several dozen **Long-billed Dowitchers** foraging at this end of the lake. That evening, we once again tried some road cruising and owling, and located three **Common Poorwills** and a flyover owl species. A **Barn Owl** was detected along with the two **Great Horned Owls** from camp overnight.



Birding along the edge of the Santa Maria River riparian zone while en route to the Date Creek inflow (© Anne Pellegrini).

On Sunday morning (10 Nov.), we tried to access the wooded habitat at the north end of the lake, hoping that activity would improve with proximity to water. Unfortunately, lake levels were just high enough that we had to detour well north to some drier habitat. Activity levels were still notably higher than along the Santa Maria, with the highlights being a lingering **Summer Tanager** and an **American Goldfinch**.



'Myrtle' Yellow-rumped Warbler, left; and Summer Tanager, right (both © Mary McSparen).

Although land-bird numbers were down overall, we still had 95 bird species for this AZFO expedition and added more data for seasonal bird distribution and numbers for this under-birded area. The full species list is shown below in Table 1, with data from the 8-10 November expedition and the additional 7 November data from Janine McCabe. To see bird numbers, below are the links for the eBird checklists from this expedition. Many thanks to Janine McCabe, Marceline Vandewater, Mary McSparen, Roy May, Trevor Hinckley, and Sochetra Ly for spending their time and skills on this expedition!

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S62562390>
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S62562389>
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S62562387>
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S62562385>
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S62562384>
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<https://ebird.org/checklist/S62562377>
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S62562381>
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S62562383>



Clark's Grebes at Alamo Lake (© Janine McCabe).

Table 1. Bird Species List for Alamo Lake & Santa Maria River, 7-10 November 2019

Snow Goose	Spotted Sandpiper	Rock Wren
<i>Snow/Ross's Goose</i>	Greater Yellowlegs	Canyon Wren
Canada Goose	Bonaparte's Gull	House Wren
Northern Shoveler	Ring-billed Gull	Marsh Wren
Gadwall	California Gull	Bewick's Wren
American Wigeon	<i>gull sp.</i>	Cactus Wren
Mallard	Common Loon	European Starling
<i>Mallard x Mexican Duck (hybrid)</i>	Blue-footed Booby	Crissal Thrasher
Northern Pintail	Double-crested Cormorant	Hermit Thrush
Green-winged Teal	American White Pelican	American Robin
Canvasback	Great Blue Heron	Phainopepla
Ring-necked Duck	Great Egret	House Sparrow
Lesser Scaup	Snowy Egret	American Pipit
<i>Greater/Lesser Scaup</i>	Red-tailed Hawk	House Finch
Bufflehead	Barn Owl	Pine Siskin
Hooded Merganser	Great Horned Owl	Lesser Goldfinch
Red-breasted Merganser	Belted Kingfisher	American Goldfinch
Ruddy Duck	Red-naped Sapsucker	Black-throated Sparrow
<i>duck sp.</i>	Gila Woodpecker	Dark-eyed Junco
Gambel's Quail	Ladder-backed Woodpecker	White-crowned Sparrow
Pied-billed Grebe	Northern Flicker	Vesper Sparrow
Eared Grebe	Gilded Flicker	Song Sparrow
Western Grebe	<i>Northern/Gilded Flicker</i>	Abert's Towhee
Clark's Grebe	American Kestrel	Yellow-headed Blackbird
<i>Western/Clark's Grebe</i>	Peregrine Falcon	Western Meadowlark
Eurasian Collared-Dove	Black Phoebe	Red-winged Blackbird
Mourning Dove	Say's Phoebe	Great-tailed Grackle
Common Poorwill	Vermilion Flycatcher	<i>blackbird sp.</i>
Anna's Hummingbird	Plumbeous Vireo	Orange-crowned Warbler
<i>hummingbird sp.</i>	Loggerhead Shrike	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Greater Roadrunner	Common Raven	<i>Audubon's</i>
American Coot	Verdin	<i>Myrtle</i>
Killdeer	Horned Lark	Summer Tanager
Black-necked Stilt	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Northern Cardinal
Long-billed Dowitcher	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	
Wilson's Snipe	Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	



Approaching the riparian habitat after detouring well north of Alamo Lake (© Anne Pellegrini).