

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** ABNRB02022

**Data Sensitivity:** No

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Coccyzus americanus occidentalis*

**COMMON NAME:** Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo

**SYNONYMS:** *Coccyzus americanus*: Common synonyms include Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Chow-chow, kow-kow, rain bird, rain crow, rain dove, storm crow

**FAMILY:** Cuculidae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** *Cuculus americanus* Linnaeus, Syst. Nat., ed. 10, vol. 1, 1758, p.111. Subspecies *C. [occyzus] americanus occidentalis* Ridgway, Man. North Amer. Birds, 1887, p. 273. (AOU 1957).

**TYPE LOCALITY:** Species: In Carolina = South Carolina.  
Subspecies : Western United States = Gardner's Ranch on the western side of the Santa Rita Mountains, Arizona.

**TYPE SPECIMEN:** US 99204, E.W. Nelson, 29 June 1884.

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** *C. a. occidentalis* Ridgway (Monson and Phillips), is the only subspecies of Yellow-billed Cuckoo that occurs in Arizona. Recent genetic research by Dr. Banks indicates that there isn't any genetic difference between the eastern and western subspecies of *C. americanus* (FR 66(143):38611, 2001). This is not accepted by all ornithologists (see FR 66(143):38611, 2001). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed as a Candidate species, the western distinct population segment (DPS). This includes those yellow-billed cuckoos west of the Rocky Mountains (please see Federal register, 2001, for complete delineation of range).

**DESCRIPTION:** Long and slender with relatively short dark legs (Corman 1992). Grayish-brown above, white below; rufous primaries, lower mandible yellow. Bold black and white pattern under the tail. Sexes alike. In juvenile plumage, held well into fall, tail has much paler pattern and bill may show little or no yellow; may be confused with *C. erythrophthalmus* (Scott 1987).

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** "Song sounds hollow and wooden, a rapid staccato kuk-kuk-kuk that usually slows and descends to a kakakowlp-kowlp ending" (Scott 1987).

**ILLUSTRATIONS:** Color drawing (Robbins et al. 1983:172)  
Color drawing (Scott 1987:237)  
Color drawing (Peterson 1990:213)  
Color photo (Terres 1980:130)

**TOTAL RANGE:** Nests from southern Canada through northeastern United States, south through the United States to the Florida Keys, Central America and southern Baja California. Winters in South America to central Argentina and Uruguay (Terres 1980).

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Southern and central Arizona and extreme northeast (Monson and Phillips).

## **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** Unlike European cuckoo, only occasionally parasitizes black-billed cuckoo nest. Breeding often coincides with outbreaks of cicadas, tent caterpillars. May lay more eggs in good prey-abundant years. Extra eggs may be parasitized in other birds' nests.

**REPRODUCTION:** Both male and female build nest, often in willow or mesquite thickets, from 4 to 30 ft above ground. Nest is stick platform, thinly lined with leaves, mesquite and cottonwood strips, grass and catkins with little depression to hold eggs. Well concealed by surrounding foliage (Corman 1990). Incubate 3-4 unmarked, pale greenish-blue eggs. Eggs hatch synchronously. Male feeds first fledglings, female feeds second fledglings (Erlich et al. 1988). Incubation lasts 4-11 days with eggs changing color to greenish-yellow. Young are altricial but leave nest in 7-8 days. For a full discussion of nesting methods through care of young, see Potter 1980.

**FOOD HABITS:** "Hairy caterpillars also bird eggs, frogs, lizards, ants, beetles, wasps, flies, berries and fruit. Young fed insect regurgitant" (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

**HABITAT:** In Arizona, streamside cottonwood, willow groves, and larger mesquite bosques for migrating and breeding preferred. Rarely observed as transient in xeric desert or urban settings (Corman 1992).

**ELEVATION:** 90 – 6,710 feet (27-2045 m) in Arizona.

**PLANT COMMUNITY:** Mainly mature cottonwood-willow stands, to a lesser extent willows or isolated cottonwoods mixed with tall mesquites (Rosenberg et al. 1990).

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Populations extremely reduced. General decline in all areas seems to be occurring. North American Breeding Bird Surveys indicate population declines of 1.6% per year in North America.

## **SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:** C (USDI, FWS 2002)  
[Full species-western pop. C USDI, FWS,

**STATE STATUS:** 2001]  
WSC (AGFD, WSCA in prep)  
[State Threatened AGFD, TNW 1988]

**OTHER STATUS:** Group 2, full species level (NNDFW, NESL  
2005)  
[Group 3 (NNDFW, NESL 2000)]  
Forest Service Sensitive (USDA Region 3  
2000)

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Management of riparian habitat known to support cuckoo populations. Riparian habitat has declined up to 90% in Arizona and New Mexico thus negatively effecting this species. Other factors to consider include clearcutting, grazing, and pesticide use in riparian areas.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:**

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:** Surveys to determine cuckoo status, use of or dependence on additional areas.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** **BIA** – Cocopah and San Xavier Reservations, and Tohono O’Odham Nation; **BLM** – Havasu, Kingman, Phoenix, Safford, Tucson and Yuma Field Offices; **BOR** – Phoenix Area; **DOD** – Fort Huachuca Military Reservation and Yuma Proving Ground; **NPS** – Montezuma Castle National Monument; **USFS** – Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, Coronado, Prescott and Tonto National Forests; **USFWS** – Bill Williams, Buenos Aires, Cibola, Havasu and San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuges; State Land Department; Red Rock State Park; Patagonia Lake State Park; **AGFD** – Alamo Wildlife Area, Base Meridian/Amator Wildlife Area, Mittry Lake, Page Springs Fish Hatchery, Upper Verde River Property and Wenima Riparian Corridor; Pinal County; City of Prescott; **TNC** – Canelo Hills Cienega, Dudleyville-Cooks Lake Preserve, Hassayampa River Preserve, Muleshoe Ranch Preserve, Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve and San Pedro Riparian Preserve; Audubon Research Ranch; Private.

**SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION**

**LITERATURE CITATIONS:**

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- USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service. 2002. Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Review of Species that are Candidates or Proposed for Listing as Endangered or Threatened; Annual Notice of Findings on Recycled Petitions; Annual Description of Progress on Listing Actions. *Federal Register* 67(114): 40673.

**MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:****ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

**Revised:** 1995-01-19 (DBI)  
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