

FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson

August 2021

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Wildflower Report—Tumbleweed are green, Jimson weed has the white trumpet flowers, sunflowers are in bloom as is the Turkey mullein and the California buckwheat clusters of flowers have turned brown and are going to seed. Munz Ranch Road has the Coyote melon that are blooming. Elizabeth Lake is dry.



Jimson Weed



Sunflower



California Buckwheat



Coyote Melon

At the Ripley Desert Woodland the male Juniper trees have cones that are brown and some are turning gray and are dropping to the ground. The female Juniper trees have ripe berries that are falling to the ground. The coyotes like the ripe Juniper berries and you can see the seeds in their scat. You don't have to disturb the scat by poking with a stick because you can see the seeds along with any fur, bones or teeth from what they have eaten. They eat the berries and as it goes through their digestive system where the skin and pulp of the berries are removed and just the seeds are discarded.



Shell Fire by Gorman—Frazier Park

The Shell Fire was sparked by a car fire in the northbound lanes of I-5 just south of Grapevine Road and spread to the hillsides. Motorists were delayed in the area. As the fire progressed a drone was flying over the fire and stopped the department's air operations for a while (drones are never to fly near wildfires as they hinder firefighting efforts). The fire started on June 27, 2021 and was contained June 30, 2021 with 1,984 acres burned. There were no evacuations of structures destroyed.



GREATER ROADRUNNER

Geococcyx californianus

The greater roadrunner is a long-legged bird in the cuckoo family. The scientific name means “Californian earth-cuckoo” and it is also known as the chaparral cock, ground cuckoo and snake killer. Fossils of the greater roadrunner goes back to a cave in New Mexico, estimated at an age of 33,500 years. Fossils have also been found in the La Brea Tar Pits.

The roadrunner is about 20 to 24 inches long, has a 17-24 inch wingspan and weighs about 7.8 to 19.0 ounces. It is about 11.8 inches tall and is the largest cuckoo of the Americas. The upper body is mostly brown with black streaks and sometimes with pink spots. The neck and upper breast are white or pale brown with dark brown streaks and the belly is white. A crest of brown feathers sticks up on the head and there can be a patch of orange and blue skin behind the eye. The blue behind the eye is replaced by white in adult males. The males and females have the same plumage with the females being slightly smaller. The beak is grayish brown to gray and has a hooked tip. They have four toes on each zygodactyl foot; meaning two toes face forward and two face backward. As the roadrunner walks or runs there is an “X” footprint because of these toes and it confuses a predator as to which way the bird went. They spend most of the time on the ground and can run up to 20 mph or more. It doesn’t engage in flight very often because it cannot keep its large body airborne for very long, but will hover from a perch, such as a tree or post and will fly short distances between potential roosts. They inhabit open, flat or rolling terrain with scattered dry brush, chaparral or other desert shrub. Its vocalization is a series of 6 to 8, low, dovelike coos dropping in pitch and also makes a chattering sound.

The greater roadrunner is monogamous (one couple mate for a lifetime), forming long-term pair bonds. During courtship the male will offer gifts (such as dead animals) to the female. He will dance around her while she begs for food, then gives her the morsel after breeding briefly. The couples defend their territory and the male is more territorial, calling out to warn competitors and does not hesitate to physically push the intruders out of his territory. Both male and female help in the building of the nest, with the male collecting the material and the female constructing the nest. It is made of twigs, feathers, leaves, snake skin, and other materials. The nests are built low in a cactus or a bush. Both parents take care of the eggs and their offspring. They have also been known to lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, such as the raven and mockingbirds. The female will lay 3 to 6 eggs that will hatch after incubation period of 20 days and the chicks fledge in another 18 days and will remain near the parents up to two more weeks before dispersing to the surrounding desert.

The roadrunners are carnivorous and feed on moist foods consisting of insects, spiders (including the black widows), tarantulas, centipedes, scorpions and small animals like mice, small birds, lizards and small snakes. Because of the arid habit it has various biological and behavioral adaptations to reduce dehydration and overheating. During the hot season, it is active mostly from sunrise to mid-morning and then late afternoon to evening. It has a nasal gland that eliminates excess salt, instead of using the urinary tract like most birds and reabsorbs water from its feces before excretion. Its winter diet may consist of plant material due to the scarcity of desert animals at that time of year. It preys on rattlesnakes and some poisonous lizards. To catch a rattlesnake, it uses its wings like a matador’s cape over the snake, it snaps up a coiled rattlesnake by the tail, cracks it like a whip and repeatedly slams the snake’s head against the ground until it is dead. It then swallows the snake whole, however there are times when the snake is longer than the roadrunner’s body but this doesn’t stop the roadrunner from its normal routine. It will continue to go about its business with the snake dangling from its mouth, consuming another inch or two as the snake slowly digests. Roadrunners are preyed upon by hawks, raccoons, rat snakes, bull snakes, skunks, and coyotes.

FUN FACTS AND MYTHOLOGY

- Some frontier people believed roadrunners led lost people to trails.
- Some Pueblo Native American tribes believed that roadrunners were medicine birds and provided protection against evil spirits. In Mexico, some said that these birds brought babies, as the white stork was said to do in Europe. Their unusual X-shaped footprints are used as sacred symbols to ward off evil in many Pueblo tribes—partially because they invoke the protective power of the roadrunners themselves, and partially because the X-shape of the tracks conceals which direction the bird is headed (thus throwing malignant spirits off-track.) Stylized roadrunner tracks have been found in the rock art of ancestral tribes. The roadrunner feathers are used to decorate cradleboards as spiritual protection for the baby.
- In Southwest Indian legends, roadrunners are usually notable for their speed (despite their small size, roadrunners can run faster than humans), bravery (roadrunners kill and eat rattlesnakes), and endurance.
- The greater roadrunner appeared in a 1982 sheet of 20-cent United State Stamps showing 50 state birds and flowers, being the state bird of New Mexico.

ROAD RUNNER SHOW



Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner cartoons from the Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies, were produced by Warner Bros. Cartoons between 1949 and 1964. One can still see these cartoons on television today.

Wile E. Coyote, who believes himself to be a genius, has a goal in life and that is to catch and devour the Road Runner. He is always creating new inventions to catch the irritating Road Runner. He doesn't have any success in this endeavor but he never lets past failures affect his drive. He always tries new things, new methods, and new ideas on how to catch this bird. Some of his ideas are really ridiculous but he keeps trying anyway. He studies books that will help him understand birds and how to catch a roadrunner. He reads "how-to" manuals that come with new bird-catching products and explosive materials and he is willing to risk his life for his goal. A company he orders from is ACME Corporation, however, the products he uses rarely work, and when they don't work he takes the pain instead of the Road Runner.

The Road Runner on the other hand taunts Wile E. Coyote by running so fast on the desert roads that he leaves a trail of flame or causes the pavement to ripple, distort, or roll up like a carpet. He outruns him, stops quickly and with a "Beep-Beep" watches him fall off a cliff. Wile E. falls and finally lands at the bottom of a canyon with a puff of a dirt cloud.

Trivia—Chuck Jones, who directed most of the Road Runner/Wile E. Coyote shorts, stated that he based Wile E. partly on himself, since he frequently failed or injured himself attempting to use tools or do repairs at home.

LEGEND OF QUETZAL AND THE ROADRUNNER

Long ago, in the land of the Maya people there were beautiful flowers, birds, trees, butterflies and mammals that appeared in all colors and shapes. These were guarded over by the Great Spirit. The Great Spirit's word was law but one day he grew tired of the constant chatter and fighting among the birds. At a meeting in the center of the forest, he announced that the birds must choose a king to keep peace.

Each bird thought it possessed the best qualifications, so the:

- Cardinal stated, "Look at me. No one else is bright red and so beautiful. All birds admire me. I should be king."
- Tropical mockingbird stated, "I'm the only bird with a lovely voice. Everyone listens to me." He gave a performance of enchanting and complicated melodies.
- The wild turkey, strode into the circle and gobbled, "There's no doubt that I should be king because I'm the biggest and strongest bird. With my size and strength, I can stop fights and also defend any bird. You need a powerful king, I'm the one!"

And so, throughout the day various birds displayed their qualities. The only one that kept quiet was the quetzal. This bird was very ambitious and proud. He had elegant manners and a graceful body, but his plumage was shabby. Quetzal thought it would be impossible to be chosen as king while he was dressed so poorly. He thought for a while and flew over to his friend the roadrunner. "I want to make you a proposition," he said. "Your feathers are so handsome as any bird's here, but you are too busy with your work as messenger of the roads to become king. I don't think you possess quite the flair and sophistication that is necessary for the job. I'm afraid I can't loan these qualities to you, but you could loan me your feathers just for this occasion. After I'm elected king, I'll share the wealth and honors with you."

It was a tempting offer, but the roadrunner did not feel eager to part with his plumage. Quetzal kept persuading the roadrunner of his integrity and fine intentions and that he should think of the riches that would come to him. The roadrunner finally agreed to the terms and one by one his feathers disappeared and appeared on quetzal's body. Within minutes, the feathers had multiplied and grown so that the ambitious bird was attired in the most splendid costume imaginable. His 40-inch tail hung in a sweeping curve of jade green and his body shimmered in soft, iridescent hues of blue and green like the Maya sky and jungle. His breast blazed with the colors of a tropical sunset and his beak turned yellow as corn.

When quetzal entered the circle where the other birds had congregated, his entrance caused a hush as he was so beautiful. The Great Spirit declared: "I name the quetzal to be king of the birds." Quetzal found himself extremely busy so he never had time to return the borrowed feathers. In fact, he forgot all about his promise to the roadrunner.



As time went by a group of birds noticed that the roadrunner had not appeared in several days. They organized a search and went deep into the forest and behind a bush, they found the roadrunner, naked, trembling with cold and almost dead of hunger. Quickly the birds gave him food and drink in order to help him recover.

When he was able, the roadrunner told them of the cruel deception played by the quetzal. All the birds felt sorry for the roadrunner and decided each should donate a few feathers to cover him. That is why today the roadrunner's feathers are so oddly colored and varied in pattern. He is still searching for the quetzal that took away his plumage.

The quetzal got his red breast later when the Spanish arrived in 1519, a terrible fight ensued between them and Mayans. After the battle, many quetzals landed on the bodies of the dead Mayans. According to the story, the blood on the bodies stained the birds' feathers, giving them their red chests.

The quetzal did well as the king of the birds. It is Guatemala's national bird and an image of it is on the flag and coat of arms and is named on the local currency. In the Mayan culture it represents the symbol of freedom because the bird was once caught and held in captivity and its feathers became opaque and withered. The quetzal then plucked its own feathers out and caused it to have a heart attack because it could not stand to live in a place where it was not free. For this reason the Maya took on the quetzal as a sacred symbol of the freedom of their culture. They created elaborate headdresses for sacred ceremony and drew up the Spirit of what it means to be a free civilization and lived in harmony of what the expression of the quetzal means.

The long lustrous tail-feathers, were donned by Aztec and Mayan rulers in their headdress. However, because the birds were sacred, quetzals were simply captured and set free after their elegant tail plumage was removed. The penalty for killing the bird was death.