

## Gilded Flicker Protocol for Arizona IBA Program – March 2019

**Purpose:** Gilded Flicker is a Continental qualifying species for IBAs for the IBA program. Our main goal is to determine if the new IBAs in the Tucson area qualify for Continental status for this species – that is accomplished by documenting **30 pairs or 90 individuals**. Last spring a few volunteers did Gilded Flicker call-back surveys in the Tucson Mountains and did document enough pairs to qualify the new Tucson Mountains IBA as Continental for Gilded Flicker. Now Arizona IBA is hoping to do the same for the Tucson Sky Islands IBA (more info here: [http://aziba.org/?page\\_id=2374](http://aziba.org/?page_id=2374)) which includes Saguaro National Park East (Rincon Mountain District) and the Santa Catalinas and Rincon Mountains. The best habitat for this species for the IBA is in the Saguaro National Park portion so our surveys will focus on these areas.

**Background:** The 2016 Partners in Flight Landbird Population Plan estimates that Gilded Flickers have declined 54% between 1970 and 2014. Since Gilded Flickers were only recognized as a separate species from Northern Flicker in 1973, there is not a whole lot of historical data on this bird. The Gilded Flicker is strongly associated with dense stands of giant cactus in the Sonoran Desert. In Arizona, the species is primarily found at elevations ranging from 200–3,200 ft, although it has been recorded up to 4,600 ft. The Gilded Flicker excavates its nest primarily in saguaro and Mexican giant cardon. The species sometimes nests in riparian woodland and wooded dry washes where it may build nests in cottonwood and willow trees. In Arizona, hybrid Gilded x Northern (Red-shafted) flickers occur primarily in riparian woodlands along drainages flowing from the mountains and grasslands into the Sonoran Desert. For our surveys though we will be focusing on the Sonoran desert habitat.

**Identifying Gilded Flickers:** Gilded Flickers are very similar to Northern Flickers and even though you are surveying in good habitat for Gilded we need to be careful to rule out Northern Flicker. There are some differences to watch out for with these species. The feather shafts are yellow on Gilded and virtually all Northern Flickers in SE Arizona are the Red-shafted variety (Yellow-shafted Northern Flickers occur in eastern US). One of the most reliable marks is the crown – it is a light brown on Gilded Flicker and there is less brown on a Northern Flicker. It's a bit subtle but can really help if the bird is sitting in such a way that you can't see the feather shafts on the base of the tail or in the wings. This is a useful link: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Gilded\\_Flicker/id](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Gilded_Flicker/id)



Gilded Flicker Male



Gilded Flicker female



Northern Flicker Male (Red shafted) – note the less extensive brown on the crown

**Survey Protocol:** These are point count surveys along a trail. We are also very interested in demonstrating that call-back survey method is a valid method for surveying for this species so are OPTIONALLY asking that each route be surveyed twice – one visit with no call back and a second visit with call back using a speaker to play the “mew” call and try to illicit a response. We can then compare the results and see if more Gilded Flickers were found with or without playback. AS far as we can tell no one has actually done this for Gilded Flickers so let’s have Tucson Audubon be the group that works out a great method and protocol. This is optional for 2019 surveys, you can just do visits with call back if you like.

To do a survey the first thing is to choose a route – the routes at this moment are all trails in Saguaro National Park East (Rincon Mountain District) See map here:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1JDrfeAmpotjPCYVDozw0DWCJK5hcqhv&usp=sharing>

If you want to do a route elsewhere that can be arranged directly with Jennie.

Once you have chosen a route it needs to be surveyed on two mornings of your choice before April 30.

**First Visit: (OPTIONAL)** No call back – begin at the beginning of your trail and every 100 meters stop and do a five minute point count where you set a timer on your phone or watch for 5 minutes and look and listen for Gilded Flickers. It is important to record on your data sheet every point count location even if no Gilded Flickers are detected. If any are then record the number of birds, whether it is a pair and any notes on behavior etc. Each route needs to be a minimum of a kilometer (or ten point count locations) but can be longer is there is enough trail and if you are up for a longer hike. Please also keep a list of all bird species detected on your entire route, either in eBird (and then share the checklist link in an email to me at [jmacfarland@tucsonaudubon.org](mailto:jmacfarland@tucsonaudubon.org)) or on paper. This will be useful for info on the new IBA in general. Note: Each point does not need to be exactly 100 meters apart but 100 meters is the minimum. If it makes more sense to go further to get a good vantage point etc. then please do. Also, you need to be sure you mark on a GPS unit or on a GPS app in your smart phone each of these locations so you can do the point counts in the same locations for your second visit.

**A note about GPS:** Our data form asks that you write the UTM’s for each spot – please do this using a GPS unit or GPS app on your smart phone. We use the standard UTM units, NAD 83 which is the standard for Google Earth etc. if you prefer to do decimal degrees (the standard for many smart phone apps) that is totally fine. We can convert those later in the office, what is important is that the locations be recorded and that you can accurately find them for the second visit. We have hand held Garmin GPS units that can be loaned or alternately smart phones are quite good at this now with one of many available apps. Here is a link to a video on how to use GPS: <https://youtu.be/SjhlC93q86w> - note that I did make this regarding cuckoo surveys so ignore the info about cuckoo surveys ☺

**Call-back Visit –:** Using call back – do the same route as your optional first visit (if you did one) and stop in the same locations. This time each five minute point count is a bit different though. The first minute of your point count no playback. Then a minute in play both the “wik-wik-wik” or “kikiki” call (third in iBird app, first in Sibley app) “pew” or “kew” call (first in iBird app, second call in Sibley app). Wait a minute while looking and listening intently. Then play both calls three more times with a minute of

silence in between. Once Gilded Flickers are detected you can stop playing the call. You can also play an extra time if you thought you detected one but are not sure. Also keep a list of all species recorded as on the first visit.

Also, I am including two audio files from the AZFO sound library that are of Gilded Flickers in Arizona. They can also be used ( I typically download the audio files directly onto my phone by accessing the email they are attached to through my phone). I also have high quality Bluetooth speakers that can be borrowed from the IBA office at Tucson Audubon. Just let me know if you want to borrow one or a GPS unit.

**Regarding the two visits:** I am conscious of the fact that doing point counts without playback could possibly not be as interesting as doing point counts with playback and it is optional for 2019 surveys. One option to make the first visit without play back only 10 stops and then go a further distance and do more points on the second visit using playback. This will be apparent to us from the data forms and will allow us to determine if playback did result in more Gilded Flickers being found, one of our goals. Our other main goal is document Gilded Flickers and going further on the second visit will help with that goal of documenting a total of 30 pairs.

**Note about Pairs:** Pairs of Gilded Flickers get us closer to our goal of documenting 30 pairs but individuals are important too as we can also submit data for 90 individuals. What we have found in the past is that if you have a male Gilded Flicker playing the “kew” call could cause the female of a pair to also become visible. This should only be done on the second visit when playback is being used. As the photos on page one of this protocol show, the female lacks the red “mustache” stipe of a male. Flickers in general do much of their foraging on the ground with ants being a particular favorite of theirs and sometimes it can be difficult to detect the female if she is on the ground. On the second visit when playback is part of the protocol it can be worth it to wait a moment if you have a male and play a few “kew” calls to see if a female can be coaxed into sight.

When both visits are complete the completed datasheets should be returned to the IBA office either via email or by dropping them off at the Tucson Audubon Nature Shop.

Thank you! Any publications that result from this two-visit protocol that shows if there is an advantage to using playback in these surveys will thank you specifically for your help with these surveys.