

Gilded Flicker Protocol for Arizona IBA Program – March 2021

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) 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 the cinnamon color extends all the way to the back of the head. On Northern Flicker, there is brown on the forehead but gray on the top-back of the head. 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



Gilded Flicker Male
– note



Gilded Flicker female



Northern Flicker Male (Red shafted)

the less extensive brown on

the back of crown

Survey Protocol: These are point count surveys along a trail.

To do a survey the first thing is to choose a route – the routes are all trails in Saguaro National Park East (Rincon Mountain District), the Saguaro National Park West (Tucson Mountain District) and Tucson Mountain Park.

See map here: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1JDrfeAmpotjJPCYVDozw0DWCJK5hcqhv&usp=sharing>

If you want to do a route elsewhere or on a trail that has not been marked on the map that is totally fine! Just let Jennie know of your plans so the route can be added to the map.

Once you have chosen a route it needs to be surveyed on any morning of your choice before April 30. If you want to visit your route again to follow up on birds etc. that is allowed in the protocol.

Doing the Survey: 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. The first minute of your point count do not use 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.

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 if 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 with username ArizonalBA) 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.

A note about GPS: Our data form asks that you write the coordinates for each spot – please do this using a GPS unit or GPS app on your smart phone. You can 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. Either of these coordinate systems will work great.

Here is a link to a video on how to use GPS: <https://youtu.be/SjHIC93q86w> - note that I did make this regarding cuckoo surveys so ignore the info about cuckoo surveys 😊

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. As the photos on page one of this protocol show, the female lacks the red “mustache” stripe 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 the survey is over the completed datasheets should be returned to the IBA office either via email or by dropping them off at the Tucson Audubon Nature Shop.

You can also enter your data online – [here is a form to enter your results online](#). If you prefer to email a scan or photo of your data form, that will also work.

Thank you!