

Greater Roadrunner

Geococcyx californianus

A bird born to run, the Greater Roadrunner can outrace a human, kill a rattlesnake, and thrive in the harsh landscapes of the Desert Southwest. Roadrunners reach two feet from sturdy bill to white tail tip, with a bushy blue-black crest and mottled plumage that blends well with dusty shrubs. As they run, they hold their lean frames nearly parallel to the ground and rudder with their long tails. They have recently extended their range eastward into Missouri and Louisiana.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Greater Roadrunners are large cuckoos with a distinctive shape: long legs, a very long, straight tail, and a long neck. The head has a short crest and the bill is long, heavy, and slightly downcurved.

Color Pattern

They are tan or brown with extensive blackish streaking on the upperparts and chest. The crown is black with small, pale spots, and they have a patch of bare, blue skin behind the eye. The wings are dark with white highlights.

Behavior

Greater Roadrunners spend most of their lives on the ground hunting lizards, small mammals, and birds. They are very fast runners, leaning over parallel to the ground with their tails streaming behind them. They are weak fliers, but you may see them perched above the ground on fence posts and sometimes telephone wires.

Habitat

Greater Roadrunners are characteristic birds of the hot, shrubby expanses of the Desert Southwest. They aren't restricted to deserts, though: look for them in open country with patches of shrubs or small trees almost as far east as the Mississippi River.

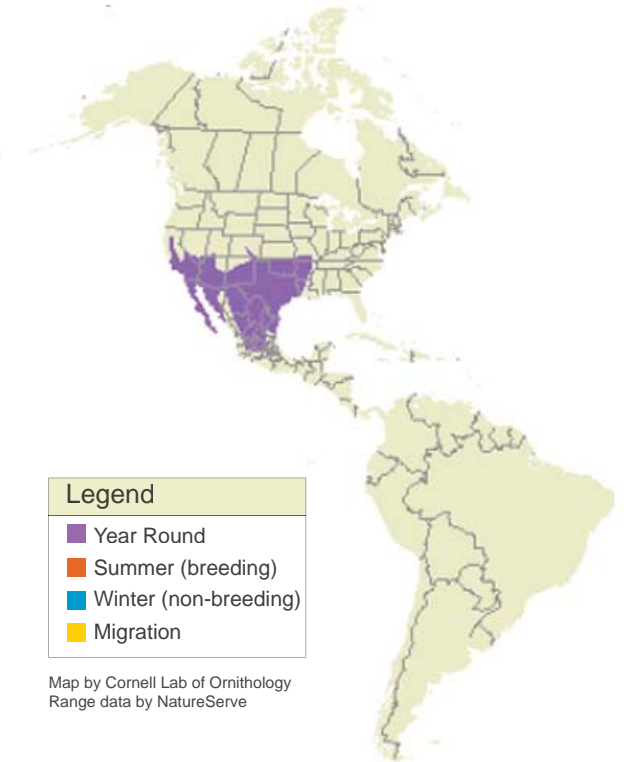
Cool Facts

- The Greater Roadrunner can reach running speeds of 30 km/hr (18.6 mi/hr). It holds its head and tail flat and parallel to the ground when running at its top speed.
- The Greater Roadrunner eats many venomous prey items, including scorpions, spiders, and rattlesnakes. Two birds may cooperate to kill a large snake.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 20.5 - 21.3 inches
- Wingspan - 19.3 inches
- Weight - 7.8 - 19 ounces



Legend	
■	Year Round
■	Summer (breeding)
■	Winter (non-breeding)
■	Migration

Map by Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Range data by NatureServe