
Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*), Maricopa County

Photographic summary and notes on identification.

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During the winter of 2006-2007 there were three sightings of Orchard Oriole in Maricopa County, with another one found during the Puerto Penasco Christmas Bird Count. Orchard Oriole is normally a casual transient and winter visitor to Arizona. Several have spent the past few winters in the lowlands, which is above average. If you have not had much experience with this species there can be some confusion with our regularly occurring species, especially with female Hooded Oriole.



28 December 2006 photo by Dave Bradford

There are a few key field marks to keep in mind when you are trying to identify an Orchard Oriole. If the bird is an adult male like this one found in Surprise, there should be no confusion. The chestnut body color is quite unlike any of our other oriole species.



24 December 2006 photo by Brendon Grice

If the bird is a female or young male, however, the identification challenge becomes much more difficult and subtle. This female found at Tres Rios is marked similar to a female Hooded Oriole, but is much smaller. Orchard Orioles are barely larger than House Finches, making them look like a colorful warbler. The female Orchard is more clear yellow underneath and the two wing bars are bolder (more obvious) than on Hoodeds. In this photo you can get a feel for the yellow color on the breast and the

prominent wing bars.



26 October 2006 photo by Brendon Grice

The Orchard Oriole has a much shorter and straighter (less decurved) bill than Hooded Oriole, as this photo from Gilbert shows. Both the Gilbert and Tres Rios birds show the short bill. The tail of an Orchard Oriole is also shorter than that of a Hooded Oriole. The individual in this photo molted its tail feathers soon after the photo was taken, so it was tailless for a couple of weeks while it grew new ones. The call note of an Orchard Oriole is another good way to distinguish it from Hooded. Orchards make a “chuck” sound, while Hoodeds give an “ink” note. Field marks such as small size, short bill, and short tail work with first year males as well. That being said, a single bird out of season and out of habitat can still cause confusion so get in the habit of

carrying a camera with you as these birders did.
