

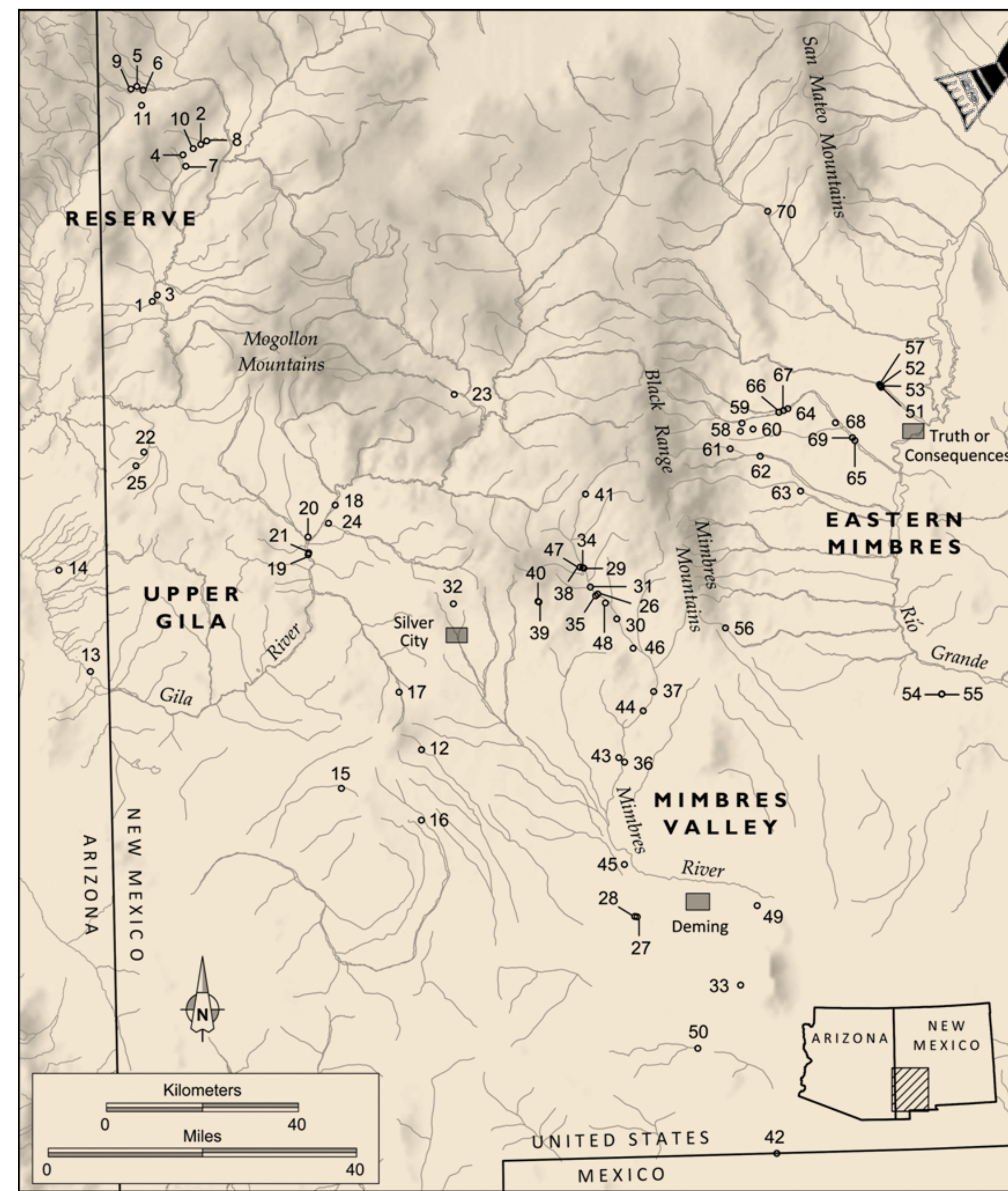
# Strange Birds: Avian Remains in the Upper Gila and Mimbres Drainages

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## Bird remains in the Mimbres region

Bird remains are seldom abundant in archaeological assemblages in the Mimbres region of southwest New Mexico. Despite their relatively low frequency, bird remains are often from interesting or unusual archaeological contexts, and provide information on cultural practices and local and regional environmental conditions.

This study examines data from over 70 archaeological assemblages from the Mimbres region, including the Reserve (upper San Francisco), upper Gila, Mimbres Valley, and eastern Mimbres drainage areas. Bird use varies over time at a regional scale, with changes in the relative abundance of important taxa. Specific taxa are also linked to particular types of cultural deposits.



Archaeological sites contributing assemblages to this project. Map by Catherine Gilman; adapted from Schollmeyer 2018.

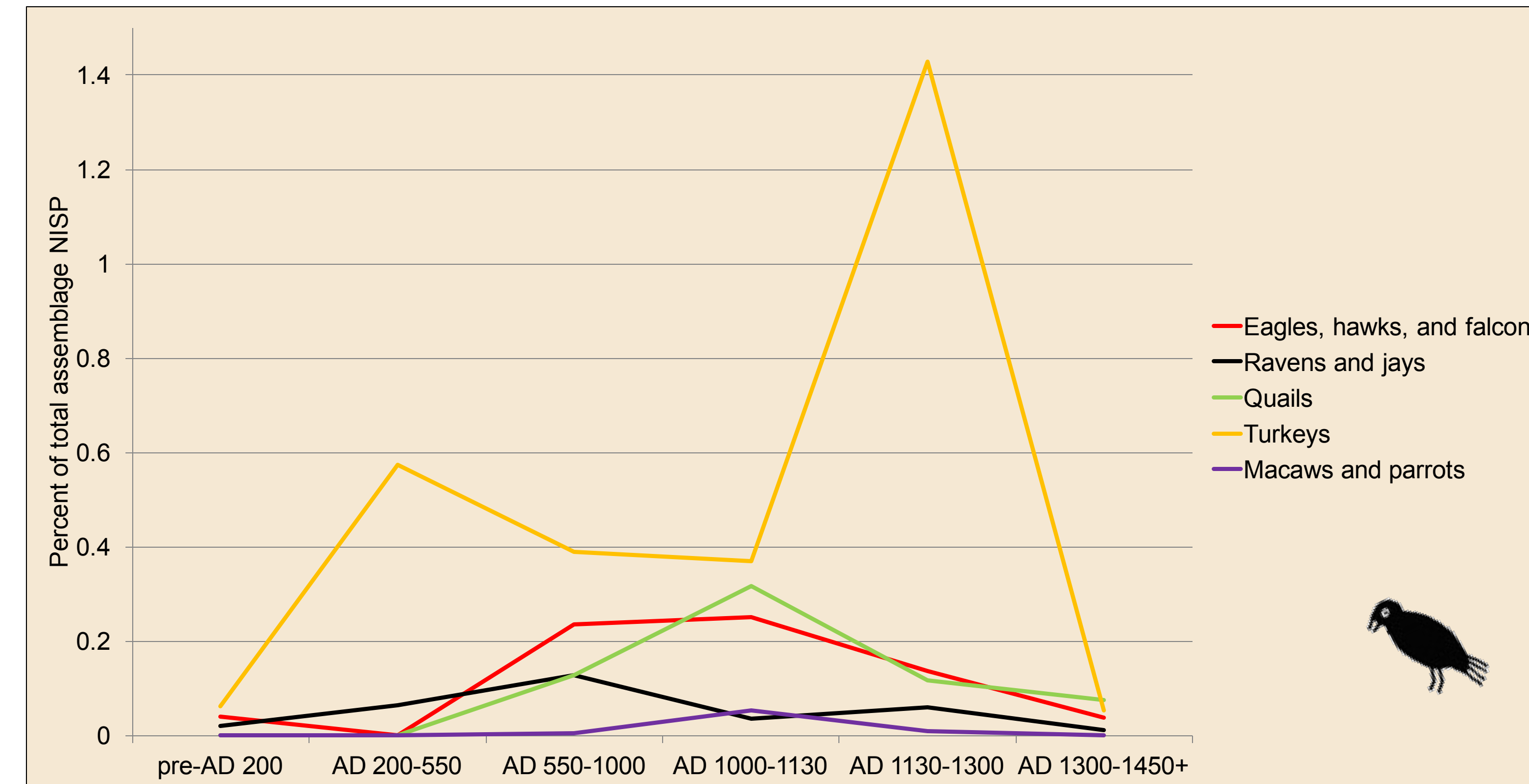
## Important bird taxa

Some taxa stood out as more common than other birds; these important taxa were represented by more than 10 elements in any drainage area and time period (interments and partial interments were counted as one occurrence). Additional taxa with smaller numbers of identified specimens (NISPs) but particularly interesting contexts were also noted.

Important taxa in this study belong to six taxonomic groups: native Southwestern Accipitridae, Falconidae, Corvidae, and Odontophoridae; *Meleagris gallopavo* (either wild or domestic); and imported Psittacidae from areas to the south.

## Bird representation over time

- Birds very uncommon relative to mammals in all areas and time periods
- Important taxa most common AD 200–1300
- Turkeys much more abundant than other birds AD 200–1300
- Low overall bird abundance means individual deposits have a substantial effect on these measures (discussed below)
- Birds nearly absent from eastern Mimbres area assemblages

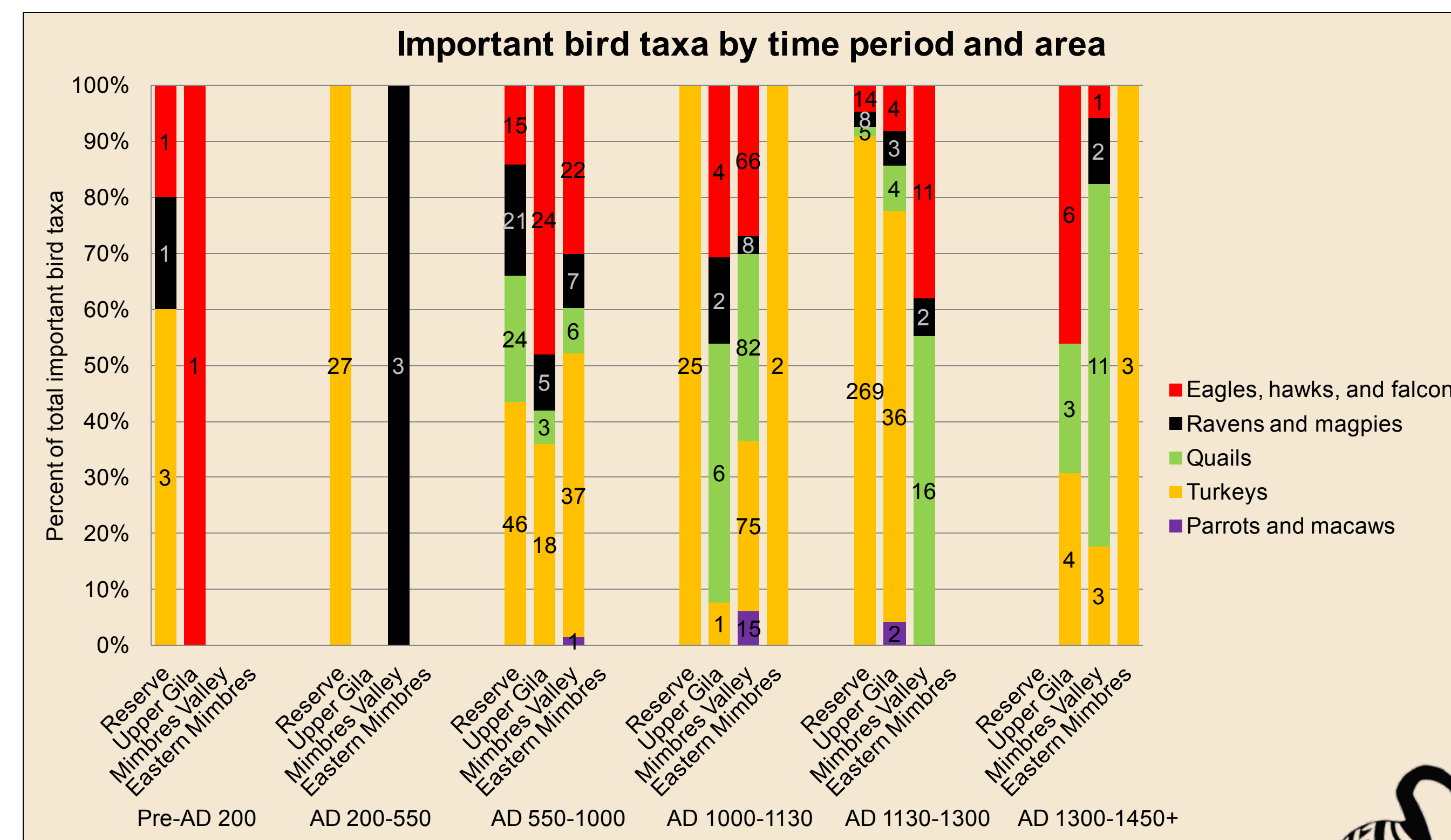


## Important bird taxa in time and space

### Eagles, hawks, and falcons

Accipitridae and Falconidae present in every time period

- Species of note include red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*), ferruginous hawks (*B. regalis*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), and prairie falcons (*F. mexicanus*)
- Most abundant AD 500–1130 in Reserve area (especially Luna Village), upper Gila (especially Wind Mountain), and Mimbres Valley (especially Montezuma)
- Hawk burials in Reserve area (Hough, Wood Canyon), upper Gila (Wind Mountain), and Mimbres Valley (NAN Ranch, Montoya)
- Golden eagle burials in upper Gila (Wind Mountain) and Mimbres Valley (Swarts and NAN Ranch)
- Kestrel and falcon burials in Reserve area (Luna Village) and Mimbres Valley (NAN Ranch)



### Turkeys

*Meleagris gallopavo* may be wild or domestic in this area

- Period of greatest abundance heavily influenced by individual site assemblages:
  - AD 200-500: 20 specimens from the SU site (at least 5 individuals)
  - AD 1130-1300: 263 specimens from the Hough site (116 from one kiva) and 33 specimens from the Gila Cliff Dwellings
- Most generalized abundance AD 1000-1130 in the Mimbres Valley and Reserve areas
  - Somewhat common AD 550-1000 in the same two areas
- Interments abundant AD 550-1130 at the Mimbres Valley sites of Elk Ridge and NAN Ranch; also found at Old Town
- A few interments in the Upper Gila area (Wind Mountain and Fornholt)

### Crows, jays, and magpies

Corvidae species of note include common raven (*Corvus corax*) and Mexican jay (*Aphelocoma ultramarina*)

- Most abundant AD 550-1000 in the Reserve area (especially Fence Corner and Luna Village) and Mimbres Valley (especially Old Town and Beauregard)
- Corvidae interment in the Mimbres Valley (NAN Ranch midden)
- Jay interments in the Reserve area (Hough, possibly Luna Village) and upper Gila (Fornholt); all associated with kiva features

### Quails

Odontophoridae species of note include Gambel's quail (*Callipepla gambelii*), scaled quail (*C. squamata*), and Montezuma quail (*Certonyx montezumae*)

- Present in small numbers in many assemblages
- Most abundant AD 1000-1130 in the Mimbres Valley (especially Old Town)
- One interment from the Mimbres Valley (NAN Ranch midden)

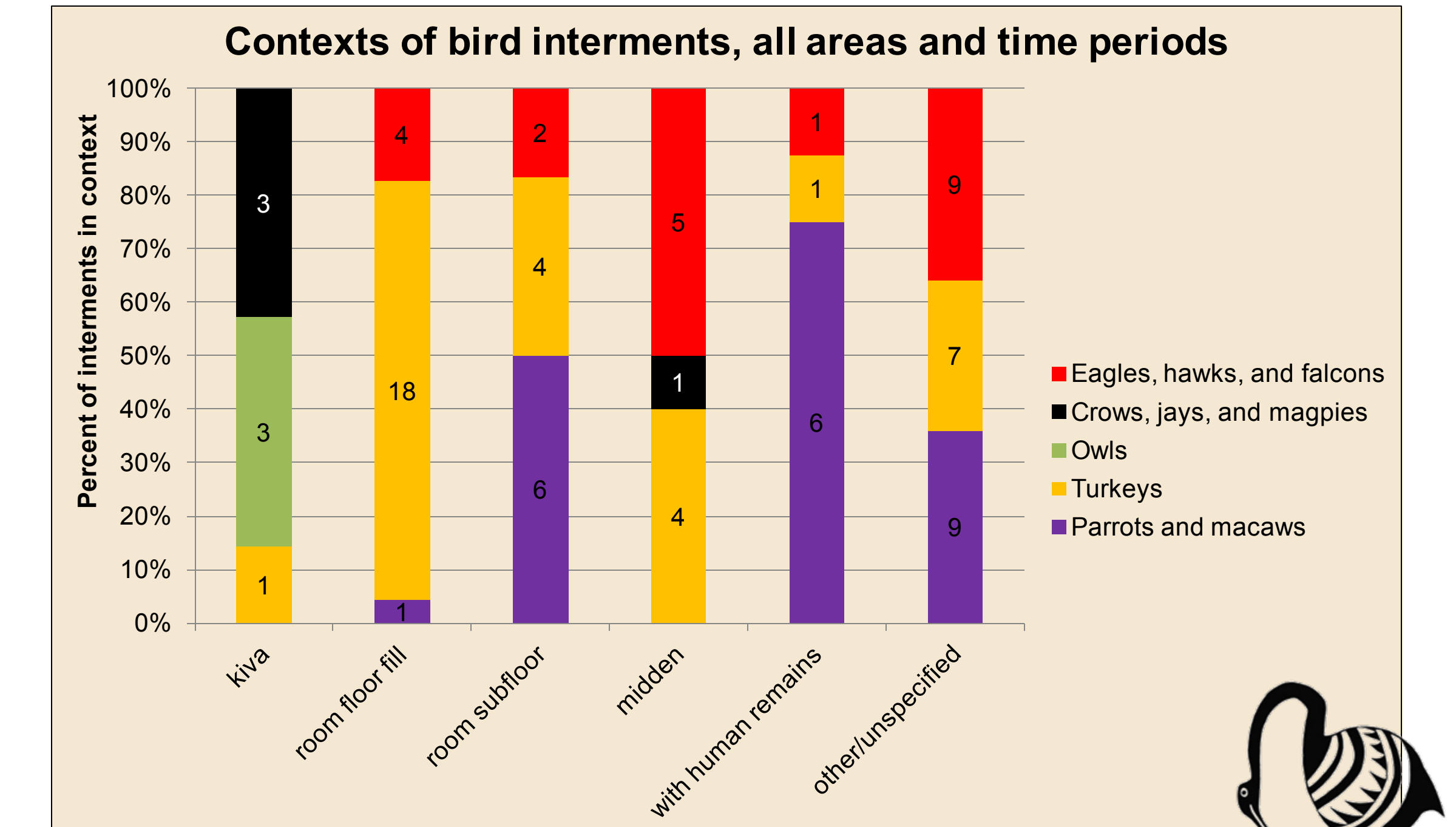
### Parrots and macaws

Psittacidae species of note include scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*), military macaw (*Ara militaris*), and thick-billed parrot (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*)

- Imported from the south and very rare in every time period
- Most abundant AD 1000-1130 in the Mimbres Valley
- Macaw interments in the Mimbres Valley (Cameron Creek, Galaz, Old Town) and upper Gila (Wind Mountain, Gila Cliff Dwellings)
- Parrot interments in the Mimbres Valley (Cameron Creek, Galaz, Treasure Hill) and upper Gila (Curtis site, Gila Cliff Dwellings)

## Rare birds in interesting contexts

- Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*): wing AD 500–1000 in upper Gila (Saige-McFarland kiva fill)
- Barn owl (*Tyto alba*): pair of wings AD 500–1000 in Mimbres Valley (Old Town kiva subfloor)
- Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*): wing AD 500–1000 in Mimbres Valley (Old Town kiva roof)
- Turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*): cranium AD 1000–1130 in eastern Mimbres (Flying Fish site room fill); complete interment AD 1300–1450+ in eastern Mimbres (Roadmap site room fill)
- Loon (*Gavia* sp.), heron or egret (*Ardea* sp.), and hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) limbs (legs and wings) in upper Gila (Gila River Farm room floor)
- Mourning dove (*Zenaidura macroura*): two partial interments AD 500–1000 in Reserve area (Luna village kiva feature) and upper Gila (Wind Mountain)



## Contexts of bird interments

- Most interred bird taxa occur in a variety of contexts
- Owls (barn owl, nighthawk, burrowing owl) and Corvidae (jay and raven) strongly associated with kivas
- Birds interred with human remains most often macaws and parrots, occasionally hawks or turkeys

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