

# Featured Plant

**Common Name:** Mexican Goldpoppy  
**Scientific Name:** *Eschscholtzia mexicana*



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Mexican goldpoppies are a familiar sight in many spring time photos hailing Arizona's colorful wildflowers during years of plentiful winter moisture. Naturalist Adelbert von Chamisso gave the genus (*Eschscholtzia*) its name in 1820 in honor of Dr. Johann Friedrich Eschscholtz. Both Chamisso and Eschscholtz were on an expedition by ship to the Pacific coast in 1817, sponsored by the Russian Count Nikolai Romanzoff. Eschscholtz was a surgeon and naturalist. Chamisso and Eschscholtz made the original collection of the California Poppy near the Presidio in San Francisco.

Mexican goldpoppies are smaller, more delicate plants that have adapted to the hotter, drier climate of Arizona. Also known as the desert goldpoppy, they can be found throughout most of Arizona, except in the northeastern part of the state. Mexican goldpoppies grow on plains, mesas, foothills and slopes from elevations of 4,500 feet and lower.

Mexican goldpoppies are annual plants that take advantage of warm, wet winters when they can cover whole hillsides. The plant itself has multiple stems that grow 12-16 inches tall. The leaves are narrow and heavily dissected, and are a blue-green color. The showy flowers are typically orange or yellow, but can rarely be found in white or pink. These plants have the potential to bloom over a very long time period during February through May, depending on the weather. The flowers open in response to the sun and close at night and under cloudy conditions. After the long, slender seed pods dry, they burst open spreading black seeds over a broad area.

In addition to Mexican goldpoppy adding color to the landscape, the plants attract doves and sparrows as they feed on the abundant, late-spring seeds. Mexican goldpoppies have an added benefit for those with allergies, as they are on several lists for use in landscaping due to their low production of airborne pollen.

# Featured Bird

**Common Name:** Grasshopper Sparrow  
**Scientific Name:** *Ammodramus saviannarum*



Robert Shantz

Homer M. Hansen, Chairman of Wings  
Over Willcox Birding & Nature Festival.

Have you ever walked down by the pasture and seen a small bird perched on top of a fence post or hanging on to a strand of barb wire, singing away, but only heard the drone of the insects around you? Then its very likely you have seen and heard a Grasshopper Sparrow, so named for its insect-like song that sounds like the stridulation of a grasshopper.

If you do observe a Grasshopper Sparrow, they appear flat-headed with large bills and short tails, which sometimes makes these birds seem "top heavy." Overall, this sparrow is gray on the back and creamy white on the front, with a dark crown divided by a white stripe. But if you get a closer look with binoculars, subtle tans border a rich rusty color on the feathers of the back and hues of yellow and orange adorn the wings and head, surprising the observer with the delicate beauty of this sparrow.

A breeding bird of the prairies and grasslands, these sparrows build their nests at the base of grass or alfalfa. They may weave a partial dome into the overhanging grasses, concealing even more their well-hidden nest. Like most birds, the Grasshopper Sparrow captures

insects during the breeding season to feed to their young. In fact, during the spring and summer, insects make up over 60 percent of their diet, with grasshoppers being one of their preferred prey, quite suitable to their name.

The Grasshopper Sparrow is unique among the sparrows of the U.S. in that it has resident populations extending into South America. The population estimates for this sparrow in the U.S. are around 11 million. However, don't be misled by the extensive range and large population size. Like other birds of the grasslands, the Grasshopper Sparrow has declined significantly, with a drop of over 65 percent from the 31 million birds surveyed during the 1960's. Studies suggest that Grasshopper Sparrows do well in pastures that are light to moderately grazed, and not mowing hayfields and alfalfa during their breeding season in July and August prevents the destruction of their nest and young.

Though not as brilliantly colored as a cardinal, nor as melodious as a thrasher, the Grasshopper Sparrow holds true to its namesake and is a great bird to have in your neighborhood.