

THE CHIRICAHUA MOUNTAINS AND ENVIRONS



The **Chiricahua Mountains** are a massive forested “sky island” mountain range with moist habitats, surrounded by a “sea” of arid lands within the Coronado National Forest. The

Chiricahuas are a region in themselves, with habitats ranging from semi-desert grassland and arid Chihuahuan desertscrub at 4000 feet to the south and east, to forests of Engelmann spruce and alpine fir at the summit of Chiricahua Peak, nearly 6000 feet higher at 9795 feet. The great size of the range (nearly 40 miles long and 20 miles wide) and its nearness to the Sierra Madrean ranges in Mexico means that a wide variety of bird, animal and plant life found nowhere else in the United States can be seen here. This is the only place in Arizona where Mexican Chickadee can be found and one of the easiest places to see Blue-throated Hummingbird. Northern species such as Northern Goshawk and Golden-crowned Kinglet nest in the coniferous forest. Approaching from Willcox to the west, the highway traverses some of Arizona’s finest grasslands. From the east, a long valley of Chihuahuan desertscrub sometimes merges into grassland.

The Chiricahuas combine breathtaking scenery with many unique opportunities for seeing birds. Three major canyons, West Turkey Creek

(Morse) on the west, Rucker on the south and Cave Creek on the east, contain permanent water and several others feature ephemeral streams with intermittent pools. All are accessible by graded roads.

Although the Chiricahuas are beautiful any time of the year, the best birding is during the warmer months of April through September. Late fall can bring attractive foliage color in maples and aspen. Winter snows generally push birds from higher elevations down into the riparian areas in South Fork and Cave Creek.

NOTE: *Horseshoe II*, the fourth largest wildfire in Arizona history, burned through most of the Chiricahua Mountains in summer 2011. Thanks in large part to the incredible work of wildland firefighters, much of the fire was of low to moderate intensity, and most areas traditionally visited by birders still offer excellent birding. Areas of severe intensity fire dramatically altered some areas, however, including Onion Saddle, Barfoot Lookout, Rustler Park, Pine Canyon, and much of Pinery Canyon Road. Look for more details in each section. In September 2014, the remnants of Hurricane Odile dumped half a season's rainfall in a single day, causing massive flooding in Cave Creek and Portal. While the road through Cave Creek Canyon was quickly repaired, campgrounds such as Idlewilde, Stewart and Sunny Flat remained closed at press time awaiting repair. Parts of Pinery Canyon Road and Forest Road 42 may be closed at times due to erosion and the risk of falling trees and rocks. Check locally for up-to-date information, including at the Cave Creek Visitor Information Center located at the beginning of the forest just before entering Cave Creek Canyon.

Caution: Rattlesnakes, including two protected species, are rather common in the Chiricahuas and in the surrounding valleys. The few recorded bite incidents invariably involve individuals carelessly handling the snakes, so the chance of being bitten while hiking or bird watching is small. Nevertheless, one should keep watch on all trails and when climbing or descending hillsides. The Arizona mountain kingsnake is also found in the range. It has caused some consternation among the uninitiated, since it bears a superficial resemblance to the coral snake. It is beautiful and harmless. Consult a field guide to snakes for more information.

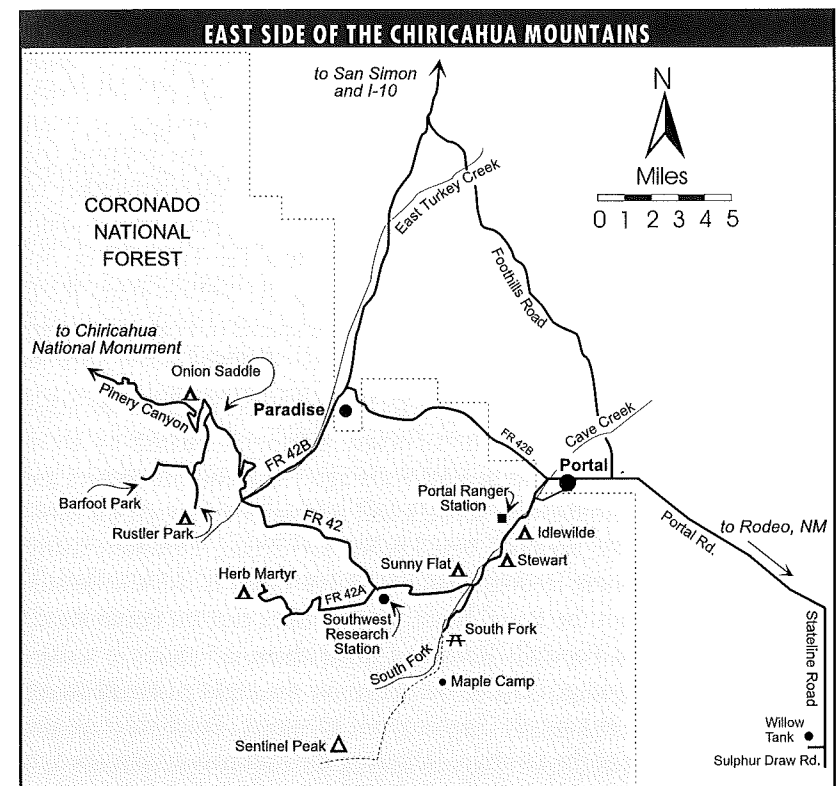
Pinery Canyon Road crosses the Chiricahua Mountains from Portal to Chiricahua National Monument via Onion Saddle. It provides access to upper-elevation birding locations (many of which were affected by

the 2011 fire) as well as spectacular views of the mountain scenery. Its 25-mile length is gravel most of the way, narrow and winding and usually closed by snow in winter.

NOTE: Many popular birding sites have become U.S. fee areas with costs and pass discounts varying from site to site. Be aware of the rules affecting where you stop to bird.

CAVE CREEK AND THE EAST SIDE

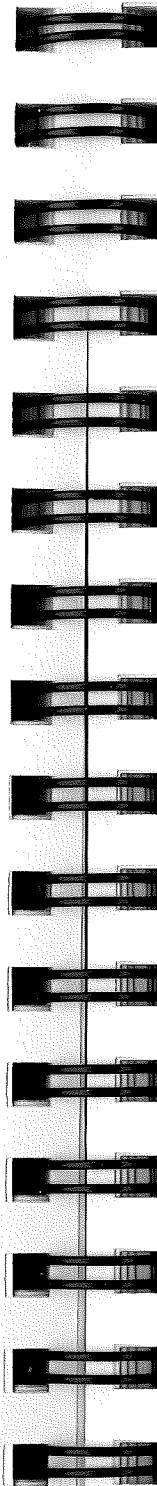
The approach from the east to Cave Creek Canyon provides striking views of the most scenic canyon in southeast Arizona. The canyon's sheer cliffs come into view as you cross the creek and reach Portal, a tiny community of about 60 residents. The community here and the canyon behind were largely spared from the 2011 fire, in large part due to the efforts of firefighters and work crews.



🌊 **Getting to Cave Creek and Portal.** There are two routes to Portal from eastbound I-10. From Willcox: Go east to the San Simon-Portal Road (exit 382) which goes right (south) to Portal. Look south here to note the profile of “Cochise’s Head,” formed by rocks of the northern end of the Chiricahua Mountains. It faces upwards with the “chin” to the west, framed by foreground peaks. The road is paved at first, then is good dirt road most of the way, but it should be avoided after a heavy rain because some washes run wide and deep. Watch out for dips and flooding. The road runs through farm and ranch lands in its 25-mile journey to Portal. The only major junction is with the road to Paradise; fork left (east) to Portal. Another route is paved the entire way and takes about the same time to travel, but is 28 miles longer. Take I-10 to Road Forks, New Mexico, then south on NM 80, 27.5 miles to NM 533 (Portal Road), which goes right (west) about 2.2 miles north of the last street in Rodeo. A third route over Onion Saddle is discussed below in the West Side description. Finally, a fourth route goes north from Douglas on AZ 80 past Rodeo. Turn left (west) on NM 533 to Portal.

Birding the main street of Portal can be quite rewarding. Park across Rock House Road from the Portal Store. Check their feeders for hummingbirds and other species. Walk the half-mile roundtrip to Rock House Road’s end, watching for a rock-walled yard just beyond the Post Office that sometimes has a variety of feeders. Please remember to respect the privacy of all residents along this street. In years past, Violet-crowned Hummingbird has been observed near the Post Office. At least 13 hummingbird species have been seen at the feeders along Rock House Road. Lucifer Hummingbirds have been sparse in Portal in recent years.

Another good yard with feeders open to birders in Portal is on the edge of the “Big Thicket” just outside of town. Formerly owned by Dave Jasper, this property was sold several years ago. The current owners are maintaining the Foothills Road feeders and keeping them open for birders. Check locally for updates. Best known for Crissal Thrasher, many other species visit these feeders (caution: Curve-billed is still the default thrasher here!). From the Portal Store, go 0.7 miles east on Portal Road. Turn left (north) on Foothills Road and drive about 0.5 miles to a usually dry stream crossing. Park at the fence on the right just across the streambed. Parking is limited. Open sunrise to sunset. Enter through the “public access” gate at the far right, following the trail past a large shed to



seating at the feeders. You can also bird along the edges of Big Thicket, but it is private property so bird only from the road.

Before leaving the Portal area you may want to explore **Stateline Road** and **Willow Tank**. The brushy areas along Stateline Road, the graded road that defines the Arizona-New Mexico boundary, are good places to look for Bendire’s Thrasher. In winter, this road teems with sparrows. State listers can work on both their New Mexico and Arizona lists here! To check for water birds at Willow Tank, follow Stateline Road south almost 4.0 miles from its junction with Portal Road and turn right (west) on E. Sulphur Canyon Road, next to a small cattle tank. Willow Tank (signed Wildlife Pond, with access provided by the Rivers family), is located 0.6 mile west of this intersection, on the right. Willow Tank once again has water in it, but all of the big cottonwoods died during its dry years. New growth along the tank will undoubtedly attract interesting birds again.

A new yard open to birders is the **Quailway Cottage**, located on Portal Road 0.9 miles west of Stateline Road (or 4.8 miles east of Foothills Road). Pull into the driveway and park immediately on the right. The very short footpath to the public viewing area is 100 feet farther down the driveway. Hours are 6:30 am–7:30 pm. Currently this is the only section of the property open to birders, so please do not wander beyond this area. A sampling of specialties here include Scaled Quail, Vermilion Flycatcher and Crissal Thrasher. A small orchard and other trees here attract many migrants.

Return to Portal and continue west on the paved road, enjoying the canyon views. **Caution:** The road is narrow; please drive carefully and do not stop on the pavement.

Proceeding up the canyon, you will pass the posts marking the Coronado National Forest boundary. Just after the cattle guard on the right is a wire gate and dirt road heading up into the desert and oak woodlands. This is a good place to stop and look for Crissal Thrasher and Montezuma Quail and desert species such as Black-throated Sparrow.

About 0.2 mile beyond this road on the left is the entrance to **Cave Creek Ranch**. The ranch maintains extensive feeding stations and welcomes day visitors from 10 am to 4 pm. Please give seating priority in the viewing area to paying guests. Large groups should call in advance

for permission to visit. For more information or to arrange to stay there, visit the web site www.cavecreekranch.com or call the managers of Cave Creek Ranch a 520-558-2334, 8 am to 5 pm MST.

Another 0.25 mile up the paved road is the **Cave Creek Visitor Information Center**, open part-time from spring through fall. **Caution:** Forest permit requirements (for commercial tours see Regulations Affecting Groups and Tour Guides in Information for Birders section) are enforced in the Chiricahuas. Applications for permits (for which a fee may be involved) may be obtained from the Douglas office listed under Helpful Information. Allow several months for processing.

Farther along, the two small campgrounds on the left, Idlewilde and Stewart, are worth checking; trogons have been seen this far down the creek. Berylline Hummingbirds nested in Stewart Campground in 2010. More expected birds along this stretch include many of the species expected along the South Fork Road. Night birding may also be good with some Elf and Screech owls nesting in trees in the campgrounds themselves. A delightful trail begins near the bridge near Stewart Campground and leads to Sunny Flat Campground.

About 2.9 miles southwest of Portal a gravel road on the left follows the **South Fork of Cave Creek** and dead-ends in 1.3 miles. This is justifiably one of the best-known birding locations in the U.S. Elegant Trogons and other delights including Arizona Woodpecker, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Plumbeous and Hutton's vireos, Painted Redstart and Hepatic Tanager nest here. Although they are never expected, many rare birds have found their way here from Mexico over the years, including Eared Quetzal, Rufous-capped Warbler and Flame-colored Tanager. The first U.S. record of Gray-collared Becard was photographed along the road here in 2009. There are numerous pullouts along the road and birding the entire road can be fruitful. After just under a mile, the road crosses the creek on a bridge. Park in the pullout before the crossing and look for the seep on the right, a good spot for wildlife including black bear, bobcat, and white-nosed coati. A Blue-throated Hummingbird usually takes up residence here; listen for its distinct chip notes. Near the end of the road you enter **South Fork Picnic Area**, a USFS fee area, with a day-use fee of \$.55 per vehicle, exempted for persons staying at the campgrounds or those with Golden Eagle, Golden Age, Golden Access or National Parks Pass with hologram. From the end

of the road a trail leads upstream through riparian woodland and on up to Sentinel Peak. The lower part of the trail (1.5 miles up to Maple Camp) is a favorite walk at all times of the year. Mexican Chickadee and Yellow-eyed Junco may be found here in winter. In late spring this area is excellent for warblers including Red-faced Warbler. Some areas above Maple Camp were heavily burned in the 2011 fire. **Note:** After the 2014 flood, South Fork changed its course to cut off the parking lot at the end of the road. Parking and access may not be as described above. Check locally for updated information.

Cave Creek is also an excellent area for owling. Starting at Portal and working up to South Fork Picnic Area might produce more than a half dozen species of owls and nightjars in spring. Playing recordings of bird sounds is banned in South Fork.

Continuing along the main paved road another 1.8 miles, you come to the **Southwestern Research Station**; enter from the Herb Martyr Road on the left. This is the private property of the American Museum of Natural History, maintained for research. Park in the lot and walk downhill to an artificial wetland and hummingbird feeders. Stop by the new gift shop for information on recent sightings or to stock up on field guides or bird checklists. Birding is good at the station and nearby. Feeders here are the best place near Portal to see Blue-throated Hummingbird. White-eared Hummingbirds may visit in summer (rare). In the wet summer months, chiggers abound in the grass around the Research Station and in the canyon bottom. As space permits, visitors may stay here overnight. Meals are available for guests. Please call or email for rates and availability. 520-558-2396 or swrs@amnh.org.

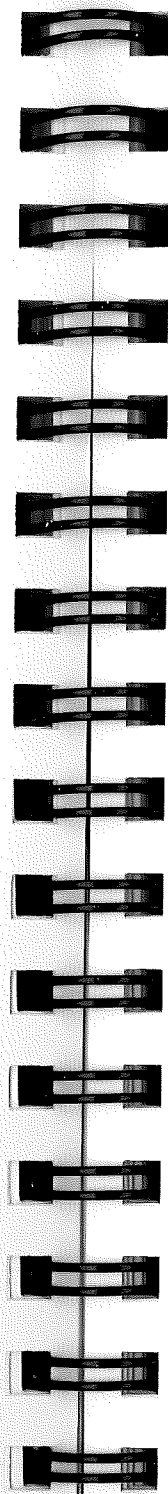
Herb Martyr Road continues along Cave Creek for about 2.0 miles to two campgrounds in the Main Fork Canyon, passing through pine-oak woodland. Several trails from the end of the road offer good birding. Greater Pewee, Painted Redstart, Mexican Whip-poor-will and Flammulated Owl are present in summer, among other target birds. A small colony of Buff-breasted Flycatchers nests between the Research Station and John Hands Campground. The flycatchers respond well to low-intensity burns and may be more abundant here in the coming years. Arizona's second record of Tufted Flycatcher was discovered in May 2008 in the draw below Herb Martyr Campground.

Past the Research Station the main road becomes dirt, narrow and winding as it ascends the 7.0 miles to Onion Saddle in conifer forest. The road winds upward through oak woodland much of the way, with excellent views of the east side of the range and the surrounding country. The marked junction with Paradise Road along East Turkey Creek is often an interesting place to look for birds and butterflies because of its moist habitat with sycamore and mixed conifers.

East Turkey Creek remains a reliable location for Mexican Chickadee. Look for them and for Yellow-eyed Junco around where the creek crosses Forest Road 42. The road to **Paradise** (FR 42B) begins at this junction and has a long grove of sycamores with the expected bird species, including Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and Cassin's Kingbird. At the tiny town of Paradise, watch for the sign on the left for the **George Walker House** that welcomes birders. Juniper Titmouse is regular here along with other specialties. Just after Paradise the graded road reaches a junction. The right turn (a bridge over East Turkey Creek) returns to Portal through oak and juniper woodland, a very good place to find Western Scrub-Jay and Black-chinned Sparrow. The other road (straight ahead) continues along the creek and eventually north to the road to San Simon.

NOTE: *Much of the high elevation conifer habitat in the following section has been dramatically altered due to fire. The Barfoot Lookout, Rustler Park, and Onion Saddle areas will have reduced opportunities for birding, but are kept in this edition of the book for reference. The habitat that remains intact in these areas is still highly productive. Check locally for up-to-date information.*

Before reaching Onion Saddle at 7600 feet the road from Cave Creek (may be closed in winter) enters mixed pine and Douglas fir. Continue left (uphill) at the saddle toward Rustler Park to a fork in the road in about 2.0 miles. Stop here at Barfoot Junction among the ponderosa pines and look for birds of upper elevations. The road to the right leads in 1.0 mile to **Barfoot Park**. This road is rougher and warrants slow-going, especially after the cattle guard at 0.6 mile. The last section down into Barfoot Park may require a high clearance vehicle or walking. In recent years, Short-tailed Hawks have been sighted regularly in summer in the Barfoot area, from the junction to the park, where they are most often seen. Barfoot Lookout is reached by a steep foot trail beginning about 250 yards north of Barfoot Junction. Look for the small trail



sign on the left. Birding along the trail is now sparse, but the view to the west is spectacular! The Lookout remains an excellent place to watch White-throated Swifts zipping by at eye level, and for resident raptors. Past the trailhead the road passes through dense fir forest to an old cattleguard. Past the cattleguard, the road drops down a rough stretch to the Park, a meadow among Ponderosa pines with an abandoned camping area with some picnic tables. The fir forest has dense stands of tall trees, shade and greater moisture than the other higher elevation sites and is worth birding. Look for Brown Creeper, Mexican Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned kinglets, Hermit Thrush, Red-faced and Olive warblers and Yellow-eyed Junco in the Douglas fir, starting about 0.2 mile along this road. The nuthatches and warblers are often common near the camp area too. Northern Saw-whet Owls have been seen near Barfoot Junction.

From Barfoot Junction, the left fork leads in about 1.0 mile to **Rustler Park**. Look for fire damage on the left from the 1994 Rattlesnake Fire, comparing it with results from the higher intensity 2011 Horseshoe II Fire on the right. Rustler Park is an oasis from the heat below. Bird the meadows, campground and around the Forest Service buildings. The park is a fee area with day-use charge of \$10 per vehicle. Note: It may be more practical for birders to park in the designated trailhead parking lot (on the left just before Rustler), pay a small parking fee and walk the short way up the road to Rustler Park proper. The spring near this parking area is a magnet for birds.

Look for Band-tailed Pigeon, Wild Turkey, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Mexican Chickadee, Red-breasted and Pygmy nuthatches, House Wren, Western Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped, Grace's, Red-faced and Olive warblers, Hepatic and Western tanagers, Black-headed Grosbeak and Yellow-eyed Junco. Cordilleran Flycatchers may sing all day. The parking area/rest room on the left just before the spring provides access to the signed trail across the road on the right that leads up to the ridge. The right fork leads to Barfoot Lookout in 1.5 miles with eye-level views of treetop birds. Swifts and swallows compete with the view from the lookout. The left fork leads south for miles into the Chiricahua Wilderness, traversing burned-over areas and intact forest. Elevation makes the trails seem steeper. The popular Rustler Park Campground is almost certain to be full on weekends in summer. **Caution:** Marauding bears are sometimes a serious

nuisance at Rustler Park at night, even breaking car windows to get at food left inside. If you intend to camp at Rustler Park, check at the visitor center in Portal for the latest information on the bear situation and be sure to use the bear proof food lockers.

Accessibility: Most roads in the forest can be birded from a car.

Habitat: Chihuahuan desertscrub, semi-desert grassland, encinal, pine-oak woodland, conifer, including spruce forest.

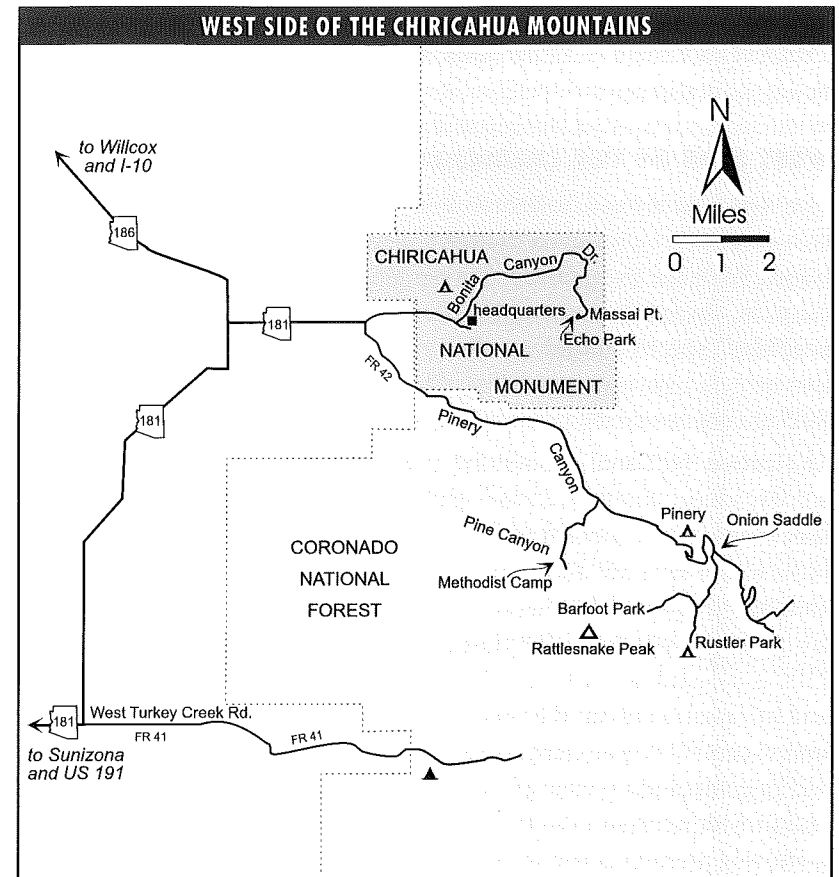
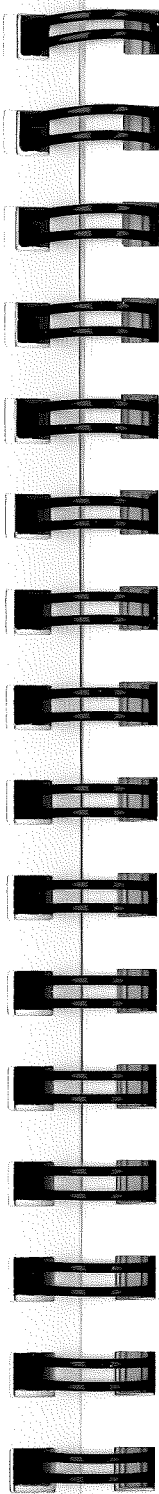
Helpful information: Portal Peak Lodge and Portal Store offer lodging, meals and groceries in Portal, 520-558-2223. When the Southwestern Research Station is not filled with researchers, you may obtain accommodations, including meals. Please make reservations in advance; 520-558-2396. Cave Creek Ranch offers cottages and apartments with kitchens on six acres along the creek, 520-558-2334. Portal's Myrtle Kraft Cottage also offers cabins; contact the Portal Peak Lodge. In Paradise, the George Walker House is a bed and breakfast, 520-558-2287. For National Forest information, call the Douglas Ranger District at 520-364-3468.

There are campgrounds near Portal in Cave Creek: Idlewilde, Stewart and Sunny Flat, with a total of 27 sites and additional primitive sites at John Hands and Herb Martyr. During spring and summer these may be crowded on weekends. Rustler Park was affected by the 2011 fires; planned reopening is tentatively set for April 2015. Afternoon and evening thunderstorms are common in July and August. Water and pit toilets available at the Visitor Information Center and campgrounds. Additional services available in Douglas, AZ and Road Forks, NM. Portal is about 175 miles from Tucson. ♿ 👤 👤

Elevation: Approximately 4800 feet at Portal, 8500 feet at Rustler Park.

FORT BOWIE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Fort Bowie National Historic Site is part of the National Park System. Located on a ridge overlooking the grassy Sulphur Springs Valley and the arid and eroded San Simon Valley, it lies between the Dos Cabezas Mountains and the Chiricahuas. The approaches from either direction are good places to see grassland birds, including many hawks. The hillsides are pinyon-juniper association with a smattering of oaks, making for an interesting bird mix. Siphon Canyon has nice stands of Arizona walnut, netleaf hackberry, velvet ash, mesquite and desert wil-



low. The site has both desertscrub and oak woodland birds including: Black-chinned Hummingbird, Acorn Woodpecker, Western Kingbird, Mexican Jay, Cactus Wren, Bridled Titmouse, Curve-billed and Crissal thrashers, Phainopepla, Hooded, Baltimore and Scott's orioles. At night, Western Screech-Owl and Elf and Great Horned owls may be heard.

🌊 **Getting to Fort Bowie.** From Willcox go south about 21 miles on AZ 186 and turn east (left) on a graded road signed for Fort Bowie and go 9.0 miles to the parking area. From Bowie or I-10 go south on Apache Road, which turns into a graded road for 12 miles, to the same parking area. The only access is by 1.5-mile trail to Apache Spring and the old fort. Canteens and proper shoes are recommended. Headquarters:

520-847-2500; www.nps.gov/fobo. Visitor center open all year except December 25; 8 am to 5 pm. Picnic sites. About 120 miles from Tucson.

Elevation: 5300 feet

WEST SIDE OF THE CHIRICAHUA MOUNTAINS

The west side of the Chiricahuas is less visited by birders than the Portal area on the east side, even though the terrain is gentler and more easily hiked. With the exception of Turkey Creek and short stretches in other canyons, stream flows are intermittent. There are just as many “Mexican specialty” species found on the west slope as on the east side, and this area can be very rewarding. Pinery, Pine, West Turkey Creek and Rucker canyons are all part of the Coronado National Forest.

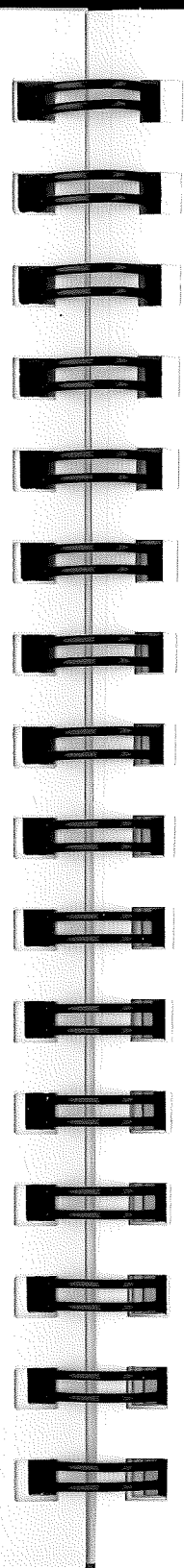
Chiricahua National Monument is worth a visit for its spectacular scenery alone. The paved road takes you along riparian habitat through spectacular rock formations, then into mixed conifers and oak. The birds found here are about the same as in Cave Creek and Rustler Park although trogons are unlikely. If Mexican Chickadees are present, they are most likely to be in the deep, forested draws in the upper canyons. This is a National Park Service unit with a visitor center. Stop for fee and information about the road and trails and a bird checklist. From the visitor center, Bonita Canyon Drive winds 8.0 miles up to Massai Point with a commanding view of the surrounding area. Trails from the road’s end provide access to the fantastic rock formations for which the monument was preserved and to intimate canyons for glimpses of birds. The Echo Canyon Trail loop gives views of the monument and superb looks at treetops below, making possible the sighting of birds often hidden in the canopy when viewed from below. The 2011 fire impacted some of the upper areas of the monument. Check locally for closures and updates.

🚶 **Getting to Chiricahua National Monument.** Chiricahua NM is reached from Willcox via AZ 186 (about 31 miles) to AZ 181 then east.

Accessibility: Some trails are at least partially wheelchair accessible. Check at the visitor center. ♿

Habitat: mesquite grassland, encinal, oak-pine, woodland, mixed conifer forest.

Helpful information: Fee. Campground just north of the visitor center; may be full on weekends and in summer. Gas, food and lodging are in Willcox. About 120 miles from Tucson. 🚲👤👤



Elevation: 5000 feet to 7300 feet

NOTE: *Some areas of Pine and Pinery Canyons were affected by the 2011 fire. Access and birding information in this section may be inaccurate due to lack of data at time of printing. The areas mentioned are kept in this edition of the book for reference.*

The road up **Pinery Canyon** is the only one that crosses over the high Chiricahuas. It is often closed in the winter but at other times provides easy access to a good variety of habitats. Since the road eventually leads to Rustler and Barfoot parks and the Portal area, it is a favorite of many birders. It starts in grassland as it leaves AZ 181 and enters oak as it follows the streambed. An owling excursion, starting here and ending at Rustler Park, might produce ten species of nightjars and owls. The winding road climbs the canyon going from oak to conifer habitats as the exposure varies. At 7000 feet, Pinery Canyon Campground is on the left (north). It has no facilities, but excellent birding in the pines and Douglas fir. You might find birds such as Hermit Thrush, Red-faced and Olive warblers, Western Tanager and Yellow-eyed Junco. The moister north facing slopes, within about a mile in either direction from the campground, are good areas to look for Mexican Chickadee. The road is unpaved and vehicles longer than 28 feet are prohibited.

Pine Canyon lies south of Pinery Canyon. The deep, cliff-lined canyon has had nesting trogons plus a great variety of warblers and is a good bet for Arizona Woodpecker, Dusky-capped and Sulphur-bellied flycatchers, Red-faced Warbler, Painted Redstart and Magnificent Hummingbird. When you reach the canyon bottom, the Methodist Camp (6200 feet) is another 0.3 mile to the left. Park there and walk around to look for Bridled Titmouse, Yellow-eyed Junco and other birds of the pine-oak woodland and mixed conifers. The Methodist Camp has a resident manager and permission should be sought to walk on the grounds (520-824-3553). If you have a high-clearance vehicle and wish to spend more time in the canyon, return 0.3 mile to the Forest Service trail sign just across the creek, turn left (west) and follow the jeep trail down the canyon. Several pools are usually to be found even if the creek is dry and birds tend to be numerous around them.

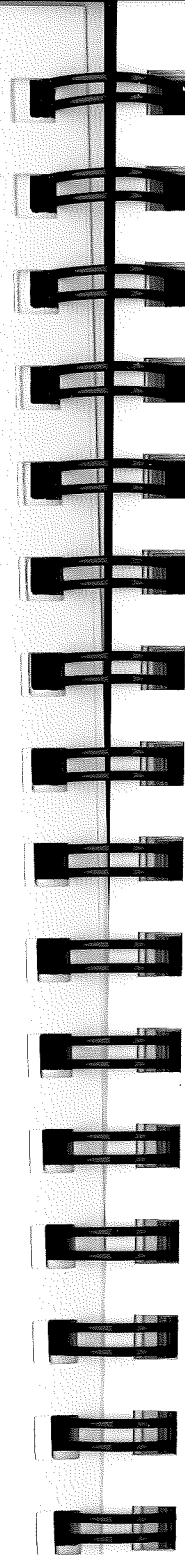
🚶 **Getting to Pinery and Pine Canyons.** Follow AZ 186 and 181 south from Willcox and turn right on the gravel road which leaves AZ 181 at the junction just before the Chiricahua National Monument boundary.

This road (which may be closed by snow in winter) ascends to Onion Saddle, providing access to Rustler Park and Cave Creek. Pine Canyon is reached by a steep but graded two-mile road that turns south from Pinery Canyon Road, 7.0 miles east of the turnoff from AZ 181.

The next major canyon to the south of Pine Canyon, **West Turkey Creek**, provides the quickest access to the entire spectrum of "sky island" habitats. The 10.9-mile dirt road is passable all year and can be driven in passenger cars, even if the going is slow.

At its junction with AZ 181 (mile 0.0) the Turkey Creek road begins in mesquite and semi-desert grassland, offering Eastern Meadowlark, Cassin's Sparrow, and at the first bridge at mile 1.3, Lucy's Warbler. In the next 2.0 miles, oaks begin to appear, and you should keep an eye out for Montezuma Quail from here on up. Cassin's Kingbird is the characteristic bird heard here. At 4.4 miles on the right is South Sunglow Road which leads to Sunglow Ranch. The ranch is closed except to paying guests but has hummingbird and suet feeders and a pond. Just past this turnoff, look for the small farm pond on the right, worth checking for migrant ducks and shorebirds. There is even a record of Least Grebe from this pond. In the next few miles the open juniper-oak habitat harbors Scott's Oriole, Mexican Jay, Bridled Titmouse, Bushtit and, in the area near mile 5.1, Juniper Titmouse. This area is also very good for Western Screech-Owl and Elf Owl. As the woodland becomes more dense and diverse look for Arizona Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-throated Gray Warbler and Whiskered Screech-Owl. Along the permanent stream on the left starting at mile 7.9 is a stretch of dense willows and blackberries, a very unusual habitat at this high elevation. Song Sparrow, Spotted Towhee and Bewick's Wren breed here, and you should check this area for unusual migrants. To bird this part of the canyon, find the widest spot to pull over and walk along the fenceline (do not cross it) to find windows to view the vegetation.

Coronado National Forest begins at mile 8.3. There is a very nice new campground on the left with pit toilets, picnic tables and fireplaces (no fee). There are other informal campsites along the road, and **Sycamore Campground** at mile 9.9 is also available (no fee). In the larger pines look for Hepatic Tanager, Olive and Grace's warblers and Painted Redstart. There are also several hiking trails that begin in



this area, including **Saulsbury Canyon**, Mormon Ridge and **Pole Bridge Canyon**, all worth investigating by the inquisitive birder. Little known is a small but reliable population of Buff-breasted Flycatchers in Sycamore Campground and downstream to Pole Bridge and Saulsbury Canyon trails. This area is also good for Northern Pygmy-Owl in the early morning, and Northern Goshawk is known to breed in these canyons. Mexican Whip-poor-will and Whiskered Screech-Owl are common, and Flammulated Owl is also present. From Sycamore Campground on up to the end of the road, at the Morse Canyon trailhead, white fir becomes more common, adding Mexican Chickadee and Red-faced Warbler to the more widespread pine-fir-oak birds. In areas of more pure pine, Hairy Woodpeckers and Pygmy Nuthatches can be found. Few Mexican strays have been found in these canyons because of the lack of coverage by birders; however, there is a record of the fabled Eared Quetzal (Trogon) from Morse Canyon.

🌀 **Getting to West Turkey Creek.** From I-10 exit 331 west of Willcox, take US 191 south about 29 miles, then left (east) on AZ 181 at Sunizona. At 12 miles where the road turns left (north), Forest Service signs direct you to Turkey Creek. Continue straight east on W. Turkey Creek Road, which is all gravel. (See Area 7 map for freeway exit detail.)

Rucker Canyon is a much shallower canyon with more exposure and a longer road that does not reach very high elevations. With more campgrounds, a permanent stream and very good pine forest it remains an excellent area for birding. Rucker Canyon was largely spared from the 2011 fire, but may be affected by subsequent debris flows. Check locally.

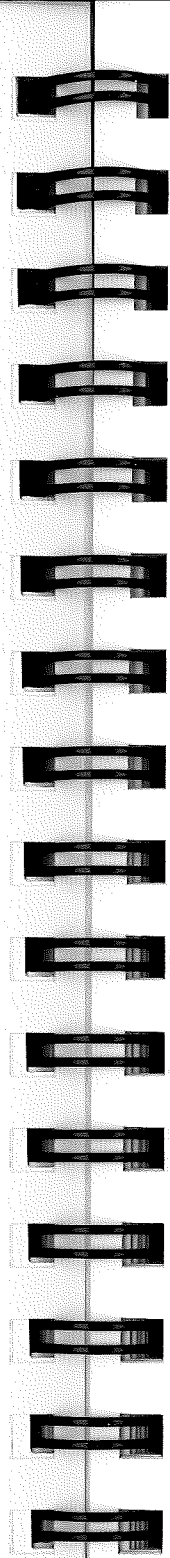
Continuing south from the junction of West Turkey Creek Road and AZ 181, a good route is Kuykendall Cutoff Road. This 7.7-mile long road stays in scrub mesquite and semidesert grassland where Pyrrhuloxia and Loggerhead Shrike are common, and it crosses oak-lined washes that have riparian birds such as Lucy's Warbler. At 4.0 miles from AZ 181 is a turnoff on the left to Stanford and Pridham canyons, two areas practically never visited by birders. The road requires high-clearance vehicles, but these canyons could yield some surprises.

The best birding along Rucker Canyon Road begins at 5.9 miles up the canyon from the junction of Kuykendall Cutoff Road (mile 0.0), or 0.5 mile from the junction with Leslie Canyon Road. Here the road begins to follow the very broad riparian area on the left, where Western

Screech-Owl and Elf Owl are common at night, and Cassin's Kingbird and Scott's Oriole are found by day. Stay right at 9.0 miles, following signs for Rucker Recreation Area, as the road continues through open oak woodland. A good place to survey this habitat type is a public access point (on private property) at mile 10.7.

At 12.2 miles the road enters the Coronado National Forest, and the left fork leads up Rucker Canyon. If heading toward Portal, continue right on FR 74 down the bumpy road that follows Tex Canyon on the southeast side of the Chiricahuas. Gray Flycatchers have been reported along the first 3.0 miles of this road. The first official campground, Camp Rucker (fee area), is at mile 12.3, and the denser oak woodland beyond here is suitable for Arizona Woodpecker and Whiskered Screech-Owl. This is a favorite habitat of Red-naped Sapsucker in winter. At 13.9 miles is the Rucker Fire Station. In the little valley on the left at mile 14.1 is a small population of Juniper Titmouse. Pine woodland begins after mile 15.4, and camping is allowed only in designated areas beyond this point. From here to road's end at 17.6 miles look for Grace's, Olive, Black-throated Gray and Virginia's warblers, Painted Redstart and Hepatic Tanager. At 17.2 miles is the former Rucker Lake. It was dramatically filled in after summer rains washed down soil and rock exposed by the large July 1994 Rattlesnake Peak burn. There are no plans to dredge the lake, as the uphill areas would have to revegetate enough to prevent silt from refilling it. Look around the lower end of this area for Buff-breasted Flycatcher. A hybrid Flame-colored X Western Tanager also summered near the Cyprus Campground for several years. There are three official campgrounds (all primitive, small and fee areas). Listen at night for Flammulated Owl, Whiskered Screech-Owl and Mexican Whip-poor-will. Several trails lead into the Chiricahua Wilderness from the campground at the end of the road, and lower reaches of the main trail can have Red-faced Warbler and Mexican Chickadee.

🏞️ **Getting to Rucker Canyon.** From Sunizona, go south 8.8 miles on US 191 to Rucker Canyon Road with signs marking Essary Hay Sales. Turn left (east) on this graded road. All junctions are marked or obvious and only major ones are listed. At 14 miles along the road you reach the intersection with Leslie Canyon Road. Turn left for Rucker Canyon; drive 7.0 miles and turn left again and drive 6.0 miles to Rucker Lake.



If traveling from Portal: head east on Portal Road about 7 miles, turning right onto Highway 80. Continue 23.5 miles and turn right (west) onto Tex Canyon Road (a.k.a. Rucker Canyon Road). In about 16 miles the turn to Rucker Canyon is on the right (north).

From its northern end at Rucker Canyon Road, Leslie Canyon Road leads through about 6.0 miles of semidesert grassland dotted with mesquite. Areas of one-seed juniper woodland should be checked for Juniper Titmouse, and the more open areas have breeding Cassin's Sparrows and Pyrrhuloxias. The main reason for driving south on this road is to check the short stretch of lush cottonwood and willow riparian growth along Leslie Creek, about 6.1 miles south of Rucker Canyon Road. Summer Tanager and Yellow-billed Cuckoo breed here in small numbers.

South of Leslie Canyon the road enters Chihuahuan desertscrub as it climbs over the southern end of the limestone Swisshelm Mountains. At 9.6 miles on the right is the junction to **McNeal and Elfrida**, and from here the road heads south to Douglas. The desertscrub here has Cactus Wren, Verdin, Black-throated Sparrow and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. The open grassland here has had Sprague's Pipit in the winter. At 23 miles is the Cochise County Fairgrounds, with an RV park and golf course on the left. The first pond on the golf course is on the right where the driveway makes a 90° turn to the left; check for migrant waterfowl and shorebirds. There is another pond on the main golf course and the scattered trees often have migrants at the appropriate time of year. At 24.1 miles Leslie Canyon Road ends at AZ 80 in Douglas.

Accessibility: The graded roads mentioned above can be birded from a car. ♿

Habitat: Mesquite grassland, encinal, oak-pine woodland, conifer.

Helpful information: Forest Service campgrounds at West Turkey Creek, Rucker Canyon and upper Pinery Canyon; all may be full on summer weekends. Several undesignated campsites in Pinery Canyon. Closest gas in Sunizona. Willcox (north) and Douglas (south) have all visitor services.

Elevation of the West Side: 5000 feet–7600 feet

SAN BERNARDINO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AND GUADALUPE CANYON

These two areas are due east of Douglas along the Mexican border. Both contain riparian areas. The wildlife refuge has young willow and cottonwood surrounding several cienegas. Guadalupe Canyon has large sycamore and cottonwood along its intermittent stream.

San Bernardino NWR was established in 1982 to protect water resources and provide habitat for endangered native fish. It was intensively ranched for over 100 years. Now managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the riparian vegetation and native grasslands are recovering. Expect many of the same bird species as are presently found in the San Pedro River drainage. The Refuge is open during daylight hours, 7 days a week.

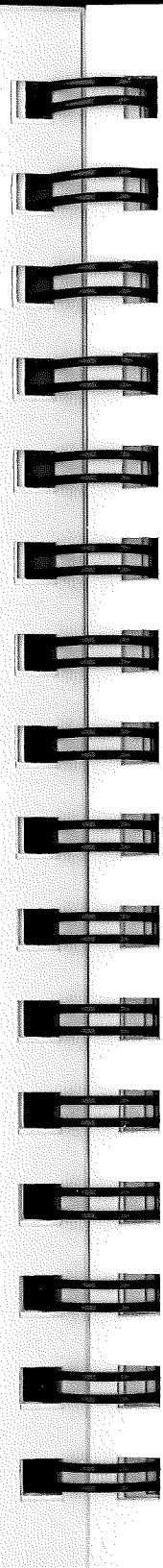
The refuge entrance road leads 0.5 mile to the visitor center parking area where several miles of trails provide access to some of the birding areas. You can also access the **Slaughter Ranch** property (\$5 admission) with its large cottonwoods and ponds that attract water birds. The ponds and mesquite thickets here are a potential vagrant trap, and have lured rarities such as Blue Mockingbird and Ruddy Ground-dove.

Caution: The refuge has become a popular route for drug smuggling.

Helpful information: Operations may be changing at Slaughter Ranch and their website (www.slaughterranch.com) should be checked for current access information. Information and a map are available from the San Bernardino NWR office at 7268 N. US 191 (between mileposts 11 and 12) outside Douglas. Hours: Monday to Friday 8 am to 4 pm. Closed on federal holidays; 520-364-2104.

www.fws.gov/southwest/REFUGES/arizona/sanbernardino.html

Guadalupe Canyon is privately owned and is being managed to restore the riparian habitat. It is well known for its population of Violet-crowned Hummingbirds and Thick-billed Kingbirds. Although historically there are many interesting bird records from the canyon, there has been little there that cannot also be found in more accessible locations closer to Tucson. The canyon is open to birding on foot in small groups. Please respect efforts to restore this area; park outside the gate even if it is open and do not camp in the canyon. Do not block the gate.



🚧 **Getting to San Bernardino NWR and Guadalupe Canyon.** From the corner of A Avenue (AZ 80) and 15th Street in Douglas, drive east. Paving ends shortly and the road name changes to Geronimo Trail. Geronimo Trail is rough and dusty, becoming slick and muddy after rain. At 17 miles there is a junction; the right fork leads downhill to the historic San Bernardino Ranch house. The entrance to the wildlife refuge is 0.25 mile farther. The left fork continues to a junction on the right (south) side of the road in 5.2 miles. Turn right and drive another 9.0 miles to the gate for Guadalupe Canyon. There is space for two or three cars to park outside the gate and off the road. Do not block the gate.