

Lower Salt and Gila Riparian Ecosystem

IBA web pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - http://www.audubon.org/important-bird-areas/lower-salt-and-gila-riparian-ecosystem - http://aziba.org/?page_id=531
Priority	Global
Qualifying Criteria	<p>A4i Greater than 1 percent of North American population of a water bird simultaneously; greater than 5 percent over a season (Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, Neotropic Cormorant)</p> <p>B1 Site Important to Special Status Avian Species Concern (Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, Neotropic Cormorant, Abert’s Towhee, Long-billed Curlew)</p> <p>D1 Site Important to Special Status Avian Species (Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, Peregrine Falcon, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Abert’s Towhee, Burrowing Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Gila Woodpecker, Yellow Warbler, LeConte’s Thrasher)</p> <p>D3 Rare, Unique, or Exceptional Representative Habitat/Ecological Community (low-elevation riparian)</p> <p>D4ii Wading bird concentrations > 2000 at one time (White-faced Ibis, Black-crowned Night Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Least Bittern)</p> <p>D4vii Site is an important migratory stop-over or seasonal concentration site for migratory land birds – density/diversity (Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Red-naped Sapsucker, Sage Thrasher, Costa’s Hummingbird, Sage Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Lawrence’s Goldfinch, Swainson’s Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Western Wood-Pewee, Cassin’s Vireo, Wilson’s warbler)</p>
IBA Polygon Center Point (Latitude, Longitude)	-112.307500 33.383200
Size	36,646 acres
County	Maricopa
Local Communities	Avondale, Buckeye, Goodyear, Phoenix
Description	The IBA is the Salt River from 83rd Avenue, connecting with the Gila River at 115 th Avenue and extending west and south along the Gila River to Gillespie Dam. The Gila River has perennial flow owed to treated effluent from the City of Phoenix and other communities, excess agricultural water, and natural ground water. The fish

	community here is considered to be one of the most abundant in Arizona and consequently, fish-eating birds are found here in high numbers. One species that benefits from this productive fishery is Neotropic Cormorants which nest within the IBA at the Tres Rios Wetlands and qualified this IBA for global designation.
Mission/Goals	Conservation of an exceptional example of low-elevation desert riparian habitat and the populations of water birds, wading birds, and land birds that depend on it.
Current Habitat Conservation, Planning, and Management Activities	Land use is mixed, including flood control, agriculture, water treatment, nature conservation, and recreation including hunting and fishing. The four State Wildlife Areas within this IBA as well as the PLO1015, sovereign lands, and the Fred J. Weiler Greenbelt are currently managed AGFD to benefit wildlife-related recreation including hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching. Annual secretive marshbird surveys and Christmas Bird Counts provide data regarding many of the IBAs focal species including threatened species like the Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, wading birds like egrets and herons, and migratory land birds such as Red-naped Sapsucker, Sage Thrasher, and Sage Sparrow.
Land Cover Type ¹ (%) and Associated Priority ² Birds ¹ Southwest Regional Gap Analysis modified to align with ABBA/SWAP habitat types ² AGFD SGCN and IBA Qualifying Species	<p>70.47 Riparian (<i>Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, Neotropic Cormorant, Black-crowned Night Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Least bittern, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Costa’s Hummingbird, Lawrence’s Goldfinch, Western Wood-Pee-wee, Cassin’s Vireo, Wilson’s Warbler, Abert’s Towhee, Yellow Warbler</i>)</p> <p>21.33 Agriculture (<i>White-faced Ibis, Burrowing Owl, Long-billed Curlew, Swainson’s Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Lark Bunting</i>)</p> <p>5.18 Sonoran/Mojave desertscrub (<i>Gila Woodpecker, Costa’s Hummingbird, Sage Thrasher, Sage Sparrow, Peregrine Falcon, Red-naped Sapsucker, Abert’s Towhee, LeConte’s Thrasher</i>)</p> <p>1.28 Wash</p> <p>1.74 Other (Urban/Residential, Sonoran Desertscrub: Uplands, Mesquite, Semiarid/Sonoran Savannah Grasslands)</p>
Related Habitat Accounts*	Lowland Riparian Freshwater Marsh Sonoran Desert
Biological Description	The area is classified as lower elevation Sonoran riparian and adjacent xero-riparian habitat. Vegetation is composed of Fremont cottonwood and Gooding willow stringers along the active channels of the river, and in remnant stringers along old channels. Back from the active channel are salt cedar, seep willow, mesquite, palo verde, and other shrubs. Mature cottonwood/willow gallery forest is sparse,

	<p>and occurs in patches, notably at 115th Avenue, near Jackrabbit Road, and a few other places. Most willows and cottonwoods are of the younger age class. Emergent and aquatic plants are well distributed throughout the reach. Adjacent irrigated farmland provides winter and migration habitat for raptors and water birds.</p> <p>The area has a rich productivity of plant growth due to the perennial supply of nutrient laden waters. The fish community is considered to be one of the most abundant in Arizona, and consequently, the numbers and diversity of fish-eating birds is phenomenal. Egrets and herons are exceptionally abundant, with annual Audubon Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) enumerating several hundred of these species (Great Egret, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Snowy Egret, and Double-crested Cormorant). Ospreys are regular winter residents, common in migration, and have attempted to nest in recent years.</p>
<p>Focal Bird Species</p>	<p><u>IBA Qualifying Species</u></p> <p>Global – Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, Neotropic Cormorant Continental - Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, Neotropic Cormorant, Long-billed Curlew State – White-faced Ibis, Black-Crowned Night Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Least Bittern, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Red-naped Sapsucker, Sage Thrasher, Costa’s Hummingbird, Sage Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Lawrence’s Goldfinch, Swainson’s Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Cassin’s Vireo, Wilson’s Warbler</p> <p><u>AGFD Species of Greatest Conservation Need</u></p> <p>Tier 1a – Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, Peregrine Falcon, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo Tier 1b – Abert’s Towhee, Burrowing Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Gila Woodpecker, Yellow Warbler, LeConte’s Thrasher</p> <p><u>Federal Threatened or Endangered Species</u></p> <p>Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo</p> <p><u>USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern</u></p> <p>National – Swainson’s Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Long-billed Curlew, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Costa’s Hummingbird, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Bendire’s Thrasher, LeConte’s Thrasher, Lucy’s Warbler, Lawrence’s Goldfinch</p>

	USFWS Region – Peregrine Falcon, Long-billed Curlew, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Burrowing Owl, Costa’s Hummingbird, Bendire’s Thrasher, LeConte’s Thrasher, Lucy’s Warbler
NABCI Bird Conservation Region	33: Sonoran and Mojave Deserts
Ownership	Land within this IBA is owned/managed by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission, City of Phoenix, Buckeye Irrigation District, Bureau of Land Management, Cities of Avondale, Buckeye and Goodyear and private landowners.
Conservation Land Status**	This IBA includes Arlington, B&M, Powers Butte, and Robbins Butte State Wildlife Areas as well as the PL1015, sovereign lands, and the Fred J. Weiler Greenbelt which are managed by the AGFD to benefit wildlife-related recreation including hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching. The IBA also includes the Tres Rios Wetlands Project. In addition, the IBA falls within the scope of the Maricopa Flood Control District’s the El Rio Vegetation Management Project which is intended to improve and enhance a 7-mile long, 1500 acre section of the Salt and Gila Rivers.
Human Population Density	Rural and Urban
Legislative District(s)	Arizona Congressional Districts 3 and 1 and State Legislative District 4, 13, 19, and 27
NRCS Major Land Resource Area	40: Sonoran Basin and Range
Visitation, main access, and permits needed	This IBA can be accessed through the Arizona Game and Fish Department State Wildlife Areas (http://www.azgfd.gov/outdoor_recreation/watchable_wildlife.shtml) or through the Tres Rios Wetlands Project (https://www.phoenix.gov/waterservices/tresrios/birder-info).

*References available written narratives (located on the SJV website) for general habitat types occurring within the IBA.

**Identifies whether the IBA or portions of the IBA have a special land management designation such as: wilderness, primitive area, wildlife area, refuge, park, monument, designated conservation area, conservation easement, or other similar designation

IBA Activities

Issue or Activity	Priority	Description	Actions
Tamarisk management and riparian restoration	H	Salt cedar removal and riparian habitat restoration from 91 st Avenue Tres Rios Wetlands to Gillespie Dam	Through the Lower Gila River Collaborative coordinate and cooperate on projects
Tres Rios Nature	H	Two day festival located at B&M	Annual event organized by

Festival		Wildlife Area	Avondale, Goodyear, Wildlife for Tomorrow Foundation, and AGFD
Christmas Bird Counts	H	Tres Rios and Gila River CBC's	Annual surveys
Secretive Marshbird Surveys	H	USFWS call-back protocol	Annual - coordinated by AGFD Mesa Region and USFWS
IBA Signage	M	Signs installed at AGFD wildlife areas	Working with region to install interpretative IBA signage
IBA Dedication Event	Done	Formal dedication at Tres Rios Festival	Completed
Updated	July-2021		

Partners:

Name	Role(s)	Contact Information	Actions
Arizona Game and Fish Department	Land managers - Arlington, B&M, Powers Butte and Robbins Butte Wildlife Areas as well as the PL1015, sovereign lands, and the Fred J. Weiler Greenbelt.	Region VI 7200 E University Drive Mesa, AZ 85207 480.981.9400	Management of these areas for wildlife-related recreation including hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching.
Wildlife for Tomorrow Foundation	Tres Rios Nature Festival	Contact Information: http://wildlifefortomorrow.org/about/	Partner with communities of Avondale, Goodyear, and Buckeye for the annual festival
Sonoran Audubon Society	IBA Steward	Contact Information: http://sonoranaudubon.org/	Bird Walks, Bird Surveys, volunteers for projects and Tres Rios Nature Festival
Maricopa County Flood Control District	Floodplain Manager	Contact Information: http://www.fcd.maricopa.gov/ 2801 West Durango St. Phoenix, AZ 85009	Partner in habitat restoration projects and El Rio Vegetation Management Plan
Lower Gila River Collaborative	Community collaborative of agencies, cities, and landowners	https://sites.google.com/view/lgrc/about-us/history-and-plans?authuser=0	Developing a strategic action plan
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Management of the PLO-1015 lands in cooperation with the Arizona Game and Fish Department	Refuge Manager P.O. Box 3509 Douglas, Arizona 85607 Phone: 520-364-2104 Fax: 520-364-2130	Restoration of the burned area downstream of B&M Wildlife Area

Conservation Targets:

These are species, communities, or ecological systems that represent and encompass the full array of biodiversity found in this IBA.

Conservation Target	Current Condition
Riparian Birds	Poor
Marsh Birds	Fair
Agriculture Birds	Good
Desert Birds	Good

Conservation Challenges:

Conservation challenges are primarily human activities that immediately affect what we are trying to conserve. Through a Miradi process, it was found that industrial/urban development, loss of farmland, and salt cedar invasion pose the greatest threats to birds within this IBA.

Challenges	Water Birds	Desert Birds	Riparian Birds	Marsh Birds	Agriculture Birds	Summary Rating
Industrial/Urban Development	High	High	High	High	High	High
Loss of Farmlands	High	NA	Medium	High	High	High
Invasive Salt Cedar	Low	NA	High	Medium	NA	Medium
Wild Fire	NA	Medium	Medium	NA	NA	Medium
Water Quality	Low	NA	Medium	Low	NA	Medium
Summary Ratings:	Low	Medium	High	High	High	High

Lower Salt/Gila Rivers Ecosystem				Severity (1-3)	Scope (1-3)	Permanence (2-4)
Threats on National Database						
Abandonment/reduction of land	Farm abandonment	7		2	2	3
Burning of vegetation	Arson/Fire	7		3	2	2
Industrialization/Urbanization	Development	9		3	2	4
Invasive species	Non-native plants	8		2	3	3
Natural events	Cowbird parasitism	6		1	2	3
Pollution	Water quality	6		1	2	3