

Cave Creek Ecosystem

IBA web pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.audubon.org/important-bird-areas/cave-creek-ecosystem-maricopa-county • http://aziba.org/?page_id=320 • Arizona Game and Fish Conservation Opportunity Area- Aquatic
Priority	State
Qualifying Criteria	<p>Site Important to Special Status Avian Species (<i>Common Black-Hawk, Elf Owl, Costa's Hummingbird, Gilded Flicker, Bell's Vireo, Lucy's Warbler, Abert's Towhee</i>)</p> <p>Rare, Unique, or Exceptional Representative Habitat/Ecological Community (<i>Low-elevation Riparian, Sonoran desertscrub</i>)</p> <p>eBird Checklist: https://ebird.org/barchart?byr=1975&eyr=2020&bmo=1&emo=12&r=US-AZ_1239</p>
IBA Polygon Center Point (Latitude, Longitude)	33.94° N, 111.94° W
Size	2,657 acres
County	Maricopa
Local Communities	Cave Creek, Carefree
Description	The Cave Creek Ecosystem IBA is located in the Sonoran Desert eco-region, specifically the Arizona Upland subdivision of the Sonoran desert scrub biome. The IBA encompasses cottonwood/willow/sycamore and mesquite bosque riparian areas along with associated desert scrub uplands. Much of the land is publicly owned and in a natural undisturbed state. It is an exceptional example of a lowland mesic and xeric southwestern riparian community with adjoining undisturbed, high quality upland Sonoran desertscrub vegetation. The perennial portions of Cave Creek and flowing/standing water elsewhere in the IBA support healthy, high quality cottonwood/willow and sycamore habitat.
Mission/Goals	To conserve and protect unique examples of lowland riparian and Sonoran desertscrub communities and the special status avian species that depend on them.
Current Habitat Conservation, Planning, and Management Activities	The Cave Creek Complex Fire ravaged much of the Cave Creek watershed in 2005. The IBA was largely spared. However,

	<p>subsequent floods damaged low-lying vegetation, washed away soil and exposed considerable cobble that remains today.</p> <p>There are two active water rights at Seven Springs, both of which allow for withdrawals from Seven Springs Wash. One is a privately held right for 90 acre feet/year that predates the Forest Service. This water is available for domestic and agricultural use. The permittee withdraws water for a commercial bottled water operation. Water use is monitored by the Cave Creek Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest, which has a right of 488 acre-feet/year to maintain the riparian vegetation and provide water for recreational purposes. Sufficient flow is being maintained in Seven Springs Wash and Cave Creek, as riparian vegetation continues to thrive in these drainages.</p>
<p>Land Cover Type¹ (%) and Associated Priority² Birds</p> <p>¹Southwest Regional Gap Analysis modified to align with ABBA/SWAP habitat types</p> <p>²AGFD SGCN and IBA Qualifying Species</p>	<p>43.37 Sonoran Desertscrub (uplands) (<i>Elf Owl, Costa's Hummingbird, Gilded Flicker, Canyon Towhee, Gila Woodpecker</i>)</p> <p>20.39 Riparian (<i>Common Black-Hawk, Elf Owl, Bell's Vireo, Lucy's Warbler, Abert's Towhee, Yellow Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow, Gila Woodpecker</i>)</p> <p>14.58 Sonoran Desertscrub/Wash: (<i>Bell's Vireo, Lucy's Warbler, Abert's Towhee, Gila Woodpecker</i>)</p> <p>12.50 Semiarid/Sonoran Savannah Grassland (<i>Golden Eagle, Savannah Sparrow, Peregrine Falcon</i>)</p> <p>6.89 Pinyon Pine-Juniper Woodland</p> <p>1.82 Urban/Residential (<i>Abert's Towhee, Gilded Flicker, Costa's Hummingbird, Gila Woodpecker</i>)</p> <p>0.47 Other (Interior Chaparral, Sonoran/Mohave Desertscrub, Mesquite) (<i>Bell's Vireo, Lucy's Warbler, Black-chinned Sparrow, Abert's Towhee</i>)</p>
<p>Related Habitat Accounts*</p>	<p>Sonoran Desert Lowland Riparian Low Grassland Pinyon Juniper</p>
<p>Biological Description</p>	<p>Three species of conservation concern are found in very high abundance: Abert's Towhee (high of 14.6 birds detected/km), Lucy's Warbler (7.7 birds/km), and Bell's Vireo (7.5 birds/km), the first resident and nesting, the latter two migrants and nesting. (Red listed), both nesting and year round residents. Common Black-Hawk (AZ Game and Fish listed Species of Greatest Conservation Need, Tier 1b), are found within the Seven Springs area. The full avian community associated with the riparian community type include breeding populations of Black Phoebe, Brown-crested Flycatcher,</p>

	<p>Bell’s Vireo, Lucy’s Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Abert’s Towhee, Song Sparrow (localized to Jewel Preserve), Blue Grosbeak, Hooded Oriole, and Bullock’s Oriole.</p> <p>Furthermore the site represents a high quality example of the Sonoran desertscrub community and supports the full range of bird species associated with this ecological community type, including healthy populations of Gambel’s Quail, White-winged Dove, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Anna’s Hummingbird, Costa’s Hummingbird, Gila Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker, Elf Owl, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Verdin, Cactus Wren, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Curve-billed Thrasher, Phainopepla, Black-throated Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, and Lesser Goldfinch.</p>
<p>Focal Bird Species</p> <p>Bold Type are Road to Recovery species</p>	<p><u>AGFD Species of Greatest Conservation Need (2022)</u></p> <p>Tier 1: Peregrine Falcon</p> <p>Tier 2: Abert’s Towhee, American Kestrel, Black-chinned Sparrow, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Brewer’s Sparrow, Bullock’s Oriole, Cactus Wren, Canyon Towhee, Common Black-Hawk, Costa’s Hummingbird, Gila Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker, Golden Eagle, Hooded Oriole, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, Olive-sided Flycatcher (migration), Prairie Falcon, Scott’s Oriole, Savannah Sparrow, Townsend’s Solitaire, Verdin, Vesper Sparrow, Western Screech Owl, Western Wood-Pewee, Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay, Yellow Warbler</p> <p><u>Federal Threatened or Endangered Species</u></p> <p>None</p> <p><u>USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern</u></p> <p>National: Peregrine Falcon, Costa’s Hummingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, Bell’s Vireo, Lucy’s Warbler</p> <p>USFWS Region: Common Black-Hawk, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Costa’s Hummingbird, Gilded Flicker, Loggerhead Shrike, Bell’s Vireo, Lucy’s Warbler, Yellow Warbler</p>
<p>NABCI Bird Conservation Region</p>	<p>33: Sonoran and Mojave Deserts 34: Sierra Madre Occidental</p>
<p>Ownership</p>	<p>Tonto National Forest, Spur Cross Conservation Area (Maricopa County Park), Desert Foothills Land Trust, Private (permission only)</p>
<p>Conservation Land Status**</p>	<p>National Forest, County Park, Land Trust</p>

Human Population Density	Semi urban
Legislative District(s)	Arizona Congressional District 1 and State Legislative District 3
NRCS Major Land Resource Area	50: Mogollon Transition 52: Sonoran Basin and Range
Visitation, main access, and permits needed	Access to the Tonto National Forest, including the Seven Springs Recreation Area and the Cave Creek Trail, is via Seven Springs Road (Forest Road 24). The Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area and the Jewel of the Creek Preserve are located at the north end of Spur Cross Road in Cave Creek. Public access is allowed on the Tonto National Forest, Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area, and designated locations on Desert Foothills Land trust properties.

*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
CBC	H	Within the Carefree CBC	Extract data from the area counts.
AZ IBA Surveys	L	Promote species counts for Gilded Flicker and Elf Owl	Encourage eBird entries
IBA Signage	M	Install signs identifying the site as an IBA	Distributed to Desert Foothills Land trust-Need to check status for Tonto and Spur Cross- Audubon Arizona lead
IBA Dedication	Done	A formal recognition event	Completed

Partners:

Name	Role(s)	Contact Information	Actions
Desert Foothills Land Trust	Land manager/conservation easements	https://www.dflt.org/	Review Miniplan, Coordinate events
Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area – Maricopa County Parks	Land manager	https://www.maricopa-countyparks.net/park-locator/spur-cross-ranch-conservation-area/ /	Review Miniplan – IBA Signage Participation in the CBC

Name	Role(s)	Contact Information	Actions
Tonto National Forest – Cave Creek Ranger District	Land manager	40202 North Cave Creek Road Scottsdale, AZ 85262 480-595-3300	Install interpretive signage at 7 Springs. Review Miniplan
Town of Cave Creek	Conservation Plan and Town Proclamation	https://www.cavecreek.org/	Periodic updates about the IBA

Conservation Targets:

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

Cave Creek Ecosystem, Maricopa County	Severity (1-3)	Scope (1-3)	Permanence (2-4)
Threats on National Database			
Forest Grazing 4	1	2	1
Water Diversions (incl. impact dikes/dams) 8	2	3	3
Natural events 6	2	2	2

Conservation Target	Current Condition
Sonoran Desert Birds	Good
Riparian Birds	Fair

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 declining water levels pose the greatest threats to birds within this IBA.

Challenges	Sonoran Desert Birds	Riparian Birds	Summary Rating
Altered Water Regime Bottled Water Company	Low	High	High

Challenges	Sonoran Desert Birds	Riparian Birds	Summary Rating
Grazing	Low	Low	Low
Wild Fire	Medium	High	Medium
Drought	Medium	High	Medium
Summary Ratings:	Medium	Medium	Medium



**Cave Creek Ecosystem
Important Bird Area**

