

San Rafael Grasslands

IBA web pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://aziba.org/?page_id=550 • https://www.audubon.org/important-bird-areas/san-rafael-grasslands • AzGFD Conservation Opportunity Area
Priority	Global
Qualifying Criteria	<p>Global: Site Important to Special Status Avian Species (Chestnut-collared Longspur)</p> <p>State: Site Important to Special Status Avian Species (Chestnut-collared Longspur, Arizona Grasshopper Sparrow, Cassin’s Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Brewer’s Sparrow, Prairie Falcon)</p> <p>Rare, Unique, or Exceptional Representative Habitat/ Ecological Community (Un-fragmented Shortgrass Prairie/Grassland)</p> <p>eBird Bar Chart https://ebird.org/region/BIRDLIFE_44528?yr=all</p>
IBA Polygon Center Point (Latitude, Longitude)	31.45° N, 110.63° W
Size	56,983 acres
County	Santa Cruz
Local Communities	Patagonia, Harshaw
Description	<p>This beautiful valley contains the headwaters of the Santa Cruz River, which flows into Mexico then turns north back into the United States to eventually join the Gila River. Land in the valley is primarily privately owned and has historically been used for cattle grazing.</p> <p>At the center of the valley is the San Rafael State Natural Area, formerly the San Rafael Ranch, which was acquired by the state in 1999 with help from the Nature Conservancy. Much of the private ranching land in the valley is protected by conservation easements to ensure that the sustainable grazing practices that have preserved this valley continue. The riparian areas and native grass prairie are home to many species of plants and animals.</p> <p>The habitat is primarily short grass prairie and is not only one of the finest stands of native grassland in the state, but is also one of the last remaining un-fragmented remnants of a grassland ecosystem in the U.S. between southern California and west Texas.</p>
Mission/Goals	Conservation of an exceptional example of un-fragmented shortgrass prairie/grassland habitat and the special status avian species that depend on it.

<p>Current Habitat Conservation, Planning, and Management Activities</p>	<p>Cattle ranching has been the predominant activity in the San Rafael Valley for approximately 175 years, and the valley’s pristine condition is due largely to the land stewardship by the ranchers. Much of the private ranching land in the valley is protected by conservation easements to ensure that these sustainable grazing practices continue.</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>69.27 Semiarid/Sonoran Savannah Grassland (<i>Chestnut-collared Longspur, Arizona Grasshopper Sparrow, Cassin’s Sparrow, Brewer’s Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Botteri’s Sparrow, Arizona Grasshopper Sparrow, Sprague’s Pipit, Prairie Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, Western Burrowing Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Common Nighthawk, Gould’s Turkey, Azure Bluebird</i>)</p> <p>15.43 Mexican Evergreen Woodland (<i>Broad-billed Hummingbird, Common Nighthawk, Gould’s Turkey, Azure Bluebird</i>)</p> <p>9.97 Chihuahuan and Sonoran Desertscrub: Lower Colorado River (<i>Prairie Falcon</i>)</p> <p>3.81 Riparian (<i>Lincoln’s Sparrow, Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Gould’s Turkey</i>)</p> <p>0.94 Interior Chaparral (<i>Black-chinned Sparrow</i>)</p> <p>0.56 Other (Pinyon Pine-Juniper Woodland, Wash, Madrean Pine-Oak Woodland, Rock, Mesquite) (<i>Northern Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Evening Grosbeak, Prairie Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, Gould’s Turkey</i>)</p>
<p>Related Habitat Accounts*</p>	<p>Low Grassland Madrean Pine-Oak Lowland Riparian</p>
<p>Biological Description</p>	<p>The San Rafael Grasslands IBA is best known for wintering raptors, sparrows, pipits, and longspurs. The plants that make up the grasslands include purple three-awn, four species of grama grasses, plains lovegrass, giant sacaton, plains bristlegrass, and vine mesquite. The San Rafael Valley also has Madrean evergreen woodland at its periphery. The Santa Cruz River headwaters are in the northern part of the valley and the river traverses its entirety. A thin strip of broadleaf riparian vegetation (Fremont Cottonwood and Goodding Willow) borders the river’s channel along with patches of giant sacaton. This IBA contains some of the last remaining un-fragmented prairie grassland in the American Southwest and is vital habitat for birds and other wildlife.</p> <p>IBA Surveyors have found many species of conservation concern including Chestnut-collared Longspur, Arizona Grasshopper Sparrow, Brewer’s Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, and Lincoln’s Sparrow. Additional surveys conducted by the Rocky Mountain Bird</p>

	<p>Observatory yielded a similar suite of species with highlights including Chestnut-collared Longspur, White-tailed Kite, and Northern Harrier. Additional species observed within this IBA include Prairie Falcon, Merlin, American Pipit, Red-naped Sapsucker, Hutton's Vireo, Horned Lark, Cassin's Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Sprague's Pipit, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Swainson's Hawk, White-tailed Kite, Scaled Quail, Montezuma Quail, Thick-billed Longspur, Botteri's Sparrow, and Western Meadowlark.</p> <p>The valley contains the famous Bog Hole Wildlife Area noted for its abundance and diversity of waterfowl such as Canvasback, Cinnamon Teal, and Mexican Mallard. This Wildlife Area also provides habitat for other birds such as Marsh Wren, Lincoln's Sparrow, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, and several swallow species. Other animals that use this pond/marsh/riparian habitat include Sonoran tiger salamander, white-tailed deer, bobcat and white-nosed coati.</p>
<p>Focal Bird Species</p> <p>Bold Type are Road to Recovery species</p>	<p><u>AGFD Species of Greatest Conservation Need</u></p> <p>Tier 1: Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle</p> <p>Tier 2: American Kestrel, American Pipit, Arizona Woodpecker, Azure Bluebird, Baird's Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Canyon Towhee, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Chihuahuan Raven, Common Nighthawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Gila Woodpecker, Golden Eagle, Gould's Turkey, Grasshopper Sparrow, Killdeer, Horned Lark, Lark Bunting, Lincoln's Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, Long-eared Owl, Northern Harrier, Prairie Falcon, Pyrrhuloxia, Thick-billed Longspur, Red-winged Blackbird, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Scaled Quail, Scott's Oriole, Sprague's Pipit, Swainson's Hawk, Vesper Sparrow, Western Burrowing Owl, Western Screech Owl</p> <p><u>Federal Threatened or Endangered Species</u></p> <p>None</p> <p><u>USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern</u></p> <p>National – Bald Eagle, Swainson's Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Solitary Sandpiper, Sprague's Pipit, McCown's Longspur, Brewer's Sparrow</p> <p>USFWS Region – Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Solitary Sandpiper, Burrowing Owl, Northern Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Sprague's Pipit, Botteri's Sparrow, Arizona Grasshopper Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, McCown's Longspur</p>
<p>NABCI Bird Conservation</p>	<p>34: Sierra Madre Occidental</p>

Region	
Ownership	Private, State, and US Forest Service
Conservation Land Status**	This conservation contains a State Natural Area (San Rafael Grassland SNA), a State Wildlife Area (Bog Hole SWA), and many private ranches containing conservation easements.
Human Population Density	Rural
Legislative District(s)	Arizona Congressional District 7 and State Legislative Districts 19 and 21
NRCS Major Land Resource Area	53: Southeastern Arizona Basin and Range
Visitation, main access, and permits needed	From Patagonia and AZ 82 at the north end of town, turn east on Taylor Road at the sign indicating San Rafael, Harshaw and Lochiel. After one block, turn north (left) on McKeown Ave/Harshaw Ave. Stay on this road - the pavement ends at 5.9 miles. Go straight ahead on the road signed for Parker Canyon Lake. At 10.3 miles, the Harshaw Canyon Road tops out at Meadow Valley Road at the viewpoint intersection in the San Rafael Valley.

*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	Part of the IBA is within the Patagonia CBC	Extract IBA data from CBC
BBS Route	H	Annual BBS survey for USGS	Extract IBA data from BBS
AZ IBA Surveys	H	Annual wintering and breeding bird surveys	Focus on Chestnut-collared Longspur and Azure Bluebird
IBA Signage	H	Install signs identifying the site as an IBA	Signs to be installed – TAS lead
IBA Dedication	M	A formal recognition event	Date and location to be determined

Partners:

Name	Role(s)	Contact Information	Actions
Arizona State Parks	San Rafael State Natural Area manager	https://azstateparks.com/san-rafael Not Open to the Public	Sustainable management of grasslands with cattle ranching

Name	Role(s)	Contact Information	Actions
Tucson Audubon Society	IBA Steward	300 E University Blvd # 120, Tucson, AZ 85705 (520) 629-0510 tucsonaudubon.org/	Bird surveys, and advocacy
Arizona Game and Fish Department	Manager Bog Hole Wildlife Area	Region V 555 N. Greasewood Rd. Tucson, AZ 85745 520-628-5376	Maintain fencing and wetlands/riparian within the Wildlife Area
Coronado National Forest, Sierra Vista Ranger District	Land manager	4070 South Avenida Saracino Hereford, AZ 85615 (520).378.0311	Coronado Forest land plan

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
Grassland Birds	Very Good
Madrean Oak Woodland Birds	Good
Riparian 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 pose the greatest threats to birds within this IBA.

Challenges	Madrean Oak Woodland Birds	Grassland Birds	Riparian Birds	Summary Rating
Mining	Very High	Medium	Very High	Low
Wild Fire	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
Drought	High	High	Very High	High
Nonnative Grasses	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Grazing	Low	Low	Medium	Low

Challenges	Madrean Oak Woodland Birds	Grassland Birds	Riparian Birds	Summary Rating
Summary Ratings:	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium

San Rafael Grasslands			Severity (1-3)	Scope (1-3)	Permanence (2-4)	Immediacy (Optional 1-2)
Threats on National Database						
Extraction Industry	Hard rock mining	10	3	2	4	1
Forest Grazing		5	1	3	1	
Natural events	Fire, Drought	4	1	2	1	

San Rafael Grasslands Important Bird Area

