

Lower Salt and Gila Riparian Ecosystem

IBA web pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://aziba.org/?page_id=531 • NAS Site 5131 • AzGFD Conservation Opportunity Areas
Priority	Global
Qualifying Criteria	<p>Global</p> <p>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>Continental</p> <p>Site Important to Special Status Avian Species of Concern (Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, Neotropic Cormorant, Abert’s Towhee, Long-billed Curlew)</p> <p>State</p> <p>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, Red-winged Blackbird)</p> <p>Rare, Unique, or Exceptional Representative Habitat/Ecological Community (low-elevation riparian)</p> <p>Wading bird concentrations > 2000 at one time (White-faced Ibis, Black-crowned Night Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Least Bittern)</p> <p>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, Sagebrush Sparrow, Bell’s Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Lawrence’s Goldfinch, Swainson’s Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Western Wood-Pewee, Cassin’s Vireo, Wilson’s warbler)</p> <p>eBird Bar Chart https://ebird.org/barchart?r=BIRDLIFE_31397&yr=all&m=</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 IBA is also the 100-year flood plain mapped by the Flood Control District of Maricopa County. 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. Neotropic Cormorants 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. Urban and industrial development, including sand and gravel mining, is expanding west along this corridor, with a concurrent loss of adjacent agriculture. The four State Wildlife Areas within this IBA as well as the US Fish and Wildlife Service PLO1015 lands (Fred J. Weiler Greenbelt) that are currently managed by 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 Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, egrets and herons, and migratory land birds such as Red-naped Sapsucker, Sage Thrasher, and Sagebrush Sparrow. The IBA is the defined study focus for the Lower Gila River Collaborative, the western extent of Rio Reimagined. https://sites.google.com/view/lgrc/about-us/rio-reimagined A Strategic Action Plan is scheduled for completion in late 2023. This IBA is included in the EPA Urban Waters Partnership, a federal program that reconnects urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies. The IBA is also within the US Fish and Wildlife Service Urban Wildlife Partnership.
<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>36.26 Riparian/Salt Cedar (<i>Yuma Ridgway’s Rail, Neotropic Cormorant, Black-crowned Night Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Costa’s Hummingbird, Lawrence’s Goldfinch, Western Wood-Peewee, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Cassin’s Vireo, Wilson’s Warbler, Abert’s Towhee, Yellow Warbler,</i>)</p> <p>31.04 Sonoran/Lower Colorado River desertscrub (<i>Gila Woodpecker, Costa’s Hummingbird, Verdin, Red-naped Sapsucker, Abert’s Towhee, LeConte’s Thrasher, Bendire’s Thrasher, Sage Thrasher, Sagebrush Sparrow</i>)</p> <p>23.79 Agriculture (<i>American Peregrine Falcon, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, White-faced Ibis, Western Burrowing Owl, Long-billed Curlew, Swainson’s Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Northern</i></p>

	<p><i>Harrier, Prairie Falcon, Horned Lark, Lark Bunting, Brewer's Blackbird)</i></p> <p>5.49 Urban and Residential (<i>Abert's Towhee, Costa's Hummingbird, Verdin, Gila Woodpecker, Brewer's Blackbird, Western Screech Owl, Inca Dove, Killdeer</i>)</p> <p>3.01 Open Water (<i>Belted Kingfisher, Neotropic Cormorant, Western White Pelican, waterfowl</i>)</p> <p>0.39 Marsh (<i>Least Bittern, Black-crowned Night Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Red-winged Blackbird</i>)</p>
<p>Related Habitat Accounts*</p>	<p>Lowland Riparian Freshwater Marsh Sonoran Desert</p>
<p>Biological Description</p>	<p>The area is classified as lower elevation Sonoran riparian and adjacent xero-riparian habitat. Vegetation is composed of Fremont cottonwood and Goodding's 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 occurs in patches and most willows and cottonwoods are of the younger age class. Emergent and aquatic plants are well distributed throughout the reach. Invasive Tamarisk spp. jeopardize the native riparian and wetlands habitats. Adjacent irrigated farmland provides winter and migration habitat for raptors and water birds.</p> <p>The area has potential for plant growth where there is a 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 some are now nesting, as are Bald Eagles.</p> <p>Restored riparian habitat in the Tres Rios Wetlands is now supporting breeding Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Yuma Ridgway's Rail have nested in the Tres Rios overbank wetlands and Least Bittern, Virginia's Rail, and Sora all nest in the regulated and overbank wetlands.</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: American Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (migration), Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Yuma Ridgway’s Rail</p> <p>Tier 2: Abert’s Towhee, American Bittern (migration), American Kestrel, American Pipit (winter), Bendire’s Thrasher, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Black-throated Sparrow, Black-throated Gray Warbler (winter/migration), Brewer’s Blackbird (winter), Brewer’s Sparrow (winter), Bullock’s Oriole, Cactus Wren, Costa’s Hummingbird, Ferruginous Hawk (winter), Gila Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker, Gray Flycatcher (winter/migration), Harris’s Hawk, Hermit Thrush (migration), Hooded Oriole, Horned Lark, Inca Dove, Killdeer, Lark Bunting (winter), LeConte’s Thrasher, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, MacGillivray’s Warbler (migration), Northern Harrier, Pyrrhuloxia, Prairie Falcon, Red-winged Blackbird, Sage Thrasher, Savannah Sparrow, Scott’s Oriole, Sprague’s Pipit (winter), Swainson’s Hawk, Verdin, Western Burrowing Owl, Western Screech Owl, Western Wood-Pewee (migration)</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> <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</p>
<p>NABCI Bird Conservation Region</p>	<p>33: Sonoran and Mojave Deserts</p>
<p>Ownership</p>	<p>Land within this IBA is owned/managed by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission, Buckeye Water Conservation and Irrigation District, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Cities of Avondale, Buckeye, Phoenix, and Goodyear and private landowners.</p>
<p>Conservation Land Status**</p>	<p>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</p>

	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 2, 7, and 9 and State Legislative Districts 16, 22, 23, and 25
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
Vegetation Management	H	Salt cedar removal and riparian habitat restoration from highway 85 east to confluence with the Agua Fria River	Interactive website with project locations
Lower Gila River Collaborative Strategic Action Plan	H	Identifying "turquoise beads" for habitat enhancement and nature based recreation focal sites	StrAP completed https://sites.google.com/view/lgrc/home
Tres Rios Nature Festival	H	Two day festival located at B&M Wildlife Area or Estrella County Park	Annual event organized by Avondale, Goodyear, Wildlife for Tomorrow Foundation, and AGFD
Bird Monitoring	H	Tres Rios and Gila River Christmas Bird Counts	Annual surveys
Bird Monitoring	H	Secretive Marshbird Surveys USFWS call-back protocol	Annual - coordinated by AGFD Mesa Region
Bird Monitoring	H	Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo Surveys Tres Rios Overbank Wetlands	Sonoran Audubon Society
Bird Monitoring	H	Motus Station	Robbins Butte WA
Bird Monitoring	H	Area Search and Census Surveys Sonoran Audubon Society	Surveys at B&M WA, Arlington WA and "Jackie Meck Lake"

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

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 and sovereign lands.	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	http://wildlifefortomorrow.org/about/	Partner with communities of Avondale, Goodyear, and Buckeye for the annual festival
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	PLO1015 land management and Ecological Services ESA consultation.	Arizona USFWS Ecological Services	BAER project and Urban Wildlife Partnership
Arizona Department of Forest and Fire	Grants and contracted funds for tamarisk removal and native plant restoration	Phone: (602) 771-1400	Administering and implementing riparian habitat projects and tamarisk treatments
Lower Gila River Collaborative	Convener of the many and diverse landowners, municipalities, agencies, and partners.	https://sites.google.com/view/lgrc/home	Coordination of working groups and reporting to leadership council. Lower Gila River Collaborative Strategic Action Plan.
Buckeye Natural Resources Conservation District	Outreach and coordination with area agricultural producers	(623) 386-4631	Possible RCPP for reach west of HWY 85
Sonoran Audubon Society	IBA Steward	Contact Information: http://sonoranaudubon.org/	Bird Walks, Bird Surveys, 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

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
Loss of Farmlands				High	High	High
Invasive Salt Cedar			High	Medium		Medium
Wild Fire			Medium			Low
Water Quality	Low		Medium	Low		Low
Cowbird Parasitism			Low			Low
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
			1	2	3

Pollution	Water quality	6			
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Yuma Ridgway's Rail habitat priority model developed by Audubon in 2020



