

Tanque Verde Wash/Sabino Canyon

IBA web pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> http://www.audubon.org/important-bird-areas/tanque-verde-washsabino-canyon-iba http://aziba.org/?page_id=626 AzGFD Conservation Opportunity Area
Priority	State
Qualifying Criteria	<p>Site Important to Special Status Avian Species (<i>Yellow-billed Cuckoo</i>, <i>Bell's Vireo</i>, <i>Gila Woodpecker</i>, <i>Northern Beardless Tyrannulet</i>, <i>Lucy's Warbler</i>, <i>Yellow Warbler</i>, <i>Black-throated Gray Warbler</i>, <i>Rufous-winged Sparrow</i>, <i>Lark Bunting</i>, <i>Gray Hawk</i>, <i>Broad-billed Hummingbird</i>, <i>Belted Kingfisher</i>, <i>Dusky-capped Flycatcher</i>, <i>Tropical Kingbird</i>, <i>Desert Purple Martin</i>, <i>Swainson's Thrush</i>, <i>Abert's Towhee</i>, <i>Lincoln's Sparrow</i>, <i>Brewer's Sparrow</i>, <i>Elf Owl</i>)</p> <p>Rare, Unique, or Exceptional Representative Habitat/Ecological Community (<i>Low-elevation Riparian</i>)</p> <p>Bar Charts - eBird</p>
IBA Polygon Center Point (Latitude, Longitude)	32.2955° N: 110.8079° W
Size	4,770 acres
County	Pima
Local Communities	Tucson
Description	Upper Sabino Canyon (Coronado National Forest) is a narrow riparian area in a deep canyon at the southern base of the Santa Catalina Mountains. Stream is perennial and lined with willow, cottonwood, ash, and sycamore. At one point a small silted in pond contains a wide area of thick vegetation. Downstream of the national forest boundary the floodplain widens and contains mesquite bosque as well as the same riparian trees as upstream. Habitat is particularly wide where lower Bear Creek flows into Sabino Creek from the northeast. Here Sabino Creek becomes an intermittent stream; meandering through more hydro- to xeroriparian vegetation until it intersects with Tanque Verde Wash. Significant housing developments abut the lower stretches.
Mission/Goals	To conserve and protect an exceptional example of low-elevation riparian habitat and the special status avian species that depend on it.
Current Habitat Conservation, Planning, and Management Activities	<p>Non-native fish removal is conducted by the Arizona Game and Fish Department and US Forest Service.</p> <p>Multiple conservation easements within the IBA are managed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC).</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>28.20 Riparian (<i>Yellow-billed Cuckoo</i>, <i>Bell's Vireo</i>, <i>Gila Woodpecker</i>, <i>Lucy's Warbler</i>, <i>Yellow Warbler</i>, <i>Black-throated Gray Warbler</i>, <i>Gray Hawk</i>, <i>Broad-billed Hummingbird</i>, <i>Belted Kingfisher</i>, <i>Dusky-capped Flycatcher</i>, <i>Tropical Kingbird</i>, <i>Desert Purple Martin</i>, <i>Swainson's Thrush</i>, <i>Abert's Towhee</i>, <i>Lincoln's Sparrow</i>, <i>Elf Owl</i>, <i>Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet</i>)</p> <p>27.46 Sonoran Desertscrub: Uplands (<i>Gila Woodpecker</i>, <i>Desert Purple Martin</i>, <i>Abert's Towhee</i>, <i>Elf Owl</i>)</p> <p>10.84 Urban/Residential (<i>Gila Woodpecker</i>, <i>Abert's Towhee</i>)</p> <p>10.39 Wash</p> <p>7.25 Semiarid/Sonoran Savannah Grassland (<i>Gila Woodpecker</i>, <i>Rufous-winged Sparrow</i>, <i>Lark Bunting</i>, <i>Brewer's Sparrow</i>)</p> <p>4.33 Mesquite (<i>Bell's Vireo</i>, <i>Gila Woodpecker</i>, <i>Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet</i>, <i>Lucy's Warbler</i>, <i>Abert's Towhee</i>)</p> <p>3.82 Chihuahuan Desertscrub (<i>Gila Woodpecker</i>, <i>Abert's Towhee</i>)</p> <p>3.11 Rock</p> <p>2.58 Mexican Evergreen Woodland (<i>Black-throated Gray Warbler</i>)</p> <p>1.86 Sonoran/Mohave Desertscrub (<i>Gila Woodpecker</i>, <i>Abert's Towhee</i>)</p> <p>0.16 Other (Pinyon Pine-Juniper Woodland, Mohave Desertscrub)</p>
<p>Related Habitat Accounts*</p>	<p>Lowland Riparian Sonoran Desert Low Grasslands Madrean Pine-Oak Pinyon Juniper</p>
<p>Biological Description</p>	<p>Arboreal flora in the floodplain consists of mesquite (<i>Prosopis velutina</i>), Arizona ash (<i>Fraxinus velutina</i>), netleaf hackberry (<i>Celtis reticulata</i>), cottonwood (<i>Populus fremontii</i>), elderberry (<i>Sambucus mexicana</i>) and some Arizona sycamores (<i>Platanus wrightii</i>). Understory shrubs include desert broom (<i>Baccharis glutinosa</i>), seep willow (<i>Baccharis salicifolia</i>), burro weed (<i>Isocoma tenuifolia</i>), creosote (<i>Larrea tridentata</i>), graythorn (<i>Ziziphus obtusifolia</i>), wolfberry (<i>Lycium</i> sp.), cholla (<i>Opuntia</i> sp.), prickly pear (<i>Opuntia</i> sp.) and desert hackberry (<i>Celtis pallida</i>). Many annuals, grasses and forbs are also found at various times of the year.</p> <p>Twenty-two species of plants, mammals, reptiles, fish, amphibians and insects within a five-mile radius of Sabino Creek are listed as special</p>

	status species according to Arizona Game and Fish Department's Heritage Data Management System. Most of these are found in the area due to the riparian habitat found in the area of the creek. Additionally, Sabino Creek attracts waterbirds (Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, and Snowy Egret), shorebirds (Wilson's Snipe and Black-necked Stilt), and even when water is abundant Double-crested Cormorant for brief periods of time at Madden pond within the IBA.
<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, Mexican Spotted Owl, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo</p> <p>Tier 2: Abert's Towhee, American Kestrel, Black-throated Gray Warbler (migration), Broad-billed Hummingbird, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Bullock's Oriole, Cactus Wren, Canyon Towhee, Common Black Hawk, Desert Purple Martin, Elegant Trogon, Gila Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker, Golden Eagle, Gray Flycatcher (migration), Hooded Oriole, Inca Dove, Killdeer, Lincoln's Sparrow, MacGillivray's Warbler (migration), Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Olive-sided Flycatcher (migration), Prairie Falcon, Pyrrhuloxia, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Scott's Oriole, Verdin, Western Screech Owl, Western Wood-pewee (migration),</p> <p><u>Federal Threatened or Endangered Species</u></p> <p>Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Mexican Spotted Owl</p> <p><u>USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern</u></p> <p>National – Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Elf Owl, Mexican Spotted Owl, Costa's Hummingbird, Bell's Vireo, Lucy's Warbler, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow,</p> <p>USFWS Region – Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Elf Owl, , Costa's Hummingbird, Gilded Flicker, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Bell's Vireo, Lucy's Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Lark Bunting</p>
NABCI Bird Conservation Region	<p>33: Sonoran and Mohave Deserts</p> <p>34: Sierra Madre Occidental</p>
Ownership	Upper Sabino Canyon is managed by the Coronado National Forest. Several private property parcels have conservation easements on them held by The Nature Conservancy and a seven-acre private property parcel (Madden property) will be donated to Tucson Audubon as a legacy property to be managed as a nature refuge.
Conservation Land Status**	National Forest, Conservation Easements
Human Population Density	Urban

Legislative District(s)	Arizona Congressional District 6 and State Legislative District 17
NRCS Major Land Resource Area	52: Sonoran Basin and Range 53: Southeastern Arizona Basin and Range
Visitation, main access, and permits needed	The Sabino Canyon Visitor Center is located in northeast Tucson, just north of the intersection of Sunrise Drive and Sabino Canyon Road at 5700 N. For more information about visiting this IBA, please visit: https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/coronado/recarea/?recid=80532 Sabino Canyon Visitor Center

*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	M	Santa Catalinas CBC	Quantify data for this IBA
AZ IBA Surveys	H	Annual IBA protocol surveys	TAS lead IBA volunteers
Yellow-billed cuckoo surveys	M	USFWS Breeding Survey Protocol	As funding is available
Stream Flows	H	Community actions to preserve stream flows	Watershed Management Group Community Watersheds Project
Tucson Bird Count	H	Volunteer surveys managed by TAS	Quantify data for this IBA
Nest box study	M	Lucy's Warbler nestbox experiment	TAS led - ongoing
IBA Signage	H	Install signs identifying the site as an IBA	Signs to be deployed by TAS
IBA Dedication	H	A formal recognition event	No date, TAS Lead

Partners:

Name	Role(s)	Contact Information	Actions
Catalina Ranger District	Land Manager	5700 N Sabino Canyon Rd, Tucson, AZ 85750 Phone: (520) 749-8700	Support Spotted Owl and Yellow-billed Cuckoo Surveys Implement Land Management Plan
Tucson Bird Alliance	IBA Steward	Tucson Bird Alliance- We speak out for wild birds and their homes	Advocacy and bird surveys
Friends of Sabino Canyon	USFS Friends Group	Contact Information https://www.sabinocanyon.org/	Volunteer work projects and trails maintenance
Watershed Management Group	Watershed Stewards	1137 N Dodge Blvd, Tucson, AZ 85716 Phone: 520-396-3266	Volunteer work projects and advocacy for flowing streams

Name	Role(s)	Contact Information	Actions
		https://watershedmg.org/	

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
Cottonwood/Willow Riparian Birds	Fair
Mesquite Bosque Birds	Good
Sonoran Desert Birds	Good
Semi-desert Grassland 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 groundwater pumping poses the greatest threats to birds within this IBA.

Challenges	Semi-Desert Grassland Birds	Cottonwood /Willow Riparian Birds	Mesquite Bosque Birds	Sonoran Desert Birds	Summary Rating
Invasive Plants Arundo	NA	High	Low	NA	Medium
OHV	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Development	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
Disturbances to Birds	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Natural Events Fire – Drought -Flooding	Low	High	High	High	Medium
Groundwater Pumping	Low	Very High	Very High	Low	High
Summary Ratings:	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium

35) Tanque Verde Wash and Sabino Canyon	Severity (1-3)	Scope (1-3)	Permanence (2-4)
Threats on National Database Disturbance to Birds 5	1	2	2

Important Bird Areas: Mini Conservation Plan

Updated
May 2025

Infrastructure	Development	7	1	2	4
Invasive species	Non-native plants (Arundo)	6	2	2	2
Natural Events	Fire, Drought	7	3	2	2
Recreation/Tourism	Off-highway vehicles	4	1	2	1
Water Diversions (incl. impact dikes/dams)	Groundwater extraction	9	2	3	4

