

Upper Santa Cruz River

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| IBA web pages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://aziba.org/?page_id=662 • AzGFD Conservation Opportunity Area |
| Priority | State |
| Qualifying Criteria | <p>Site Important to Special Status Avian Species (<i>Gray Hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Bell's Vireo, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Lucy's Warbler, Abert's Towhee, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Varied Bunting</i>)</p> <p>Rare, Unique, or Exceptional Representative Habitat/Ecological Community (<i>low-elevation riparian</i>)</p> <p>Raptors/Breeding (<i>Gray Hawk</i>)</p> <p>Bar Charts - eBird</p> |
| IBA Polygon Center Point (Latitude, Longitude) | 31.64°N, 111.04°W (estimate) |
| Size | 2,184 acres |
| County | Santa Cruz |
| Local Communities | Tubac, Amado, Tumacacori-Carmen |
| Description | <p>The Upper Santa Cruz River IBA is a 9.5 kilometer riparian corridor from Tumacacori National Historical Park (310 acres) downstream (northward) through the Tucson Audubon-held Esperanza Ranch, a 300-acre conservation easement. The IBA boundaries are defined by the riparian vegetation, including the mesquite bosques that border the broadleaf gallery forest. Compared to the rest of the Santa Cruz River, this reach has relatively high groundwater levels and long stretches of perennial flow – primarily treated effluent but with some groundwater seep augmentation.</p> <p>Additional points of interest within this IBA include a stretch the historic Juan Baptista de Anza Trail, which passes through private land on its northward route to the Tubac Country Club and a conservation easement held by Brasher Properties in the town of Tubac.</p> <p>Private lands are and will be included for recognized IBA status where landowner acceptance has been obtained; this process is on-going.</p> |
| Mission/Goals | Conservation of an exceptional example of low-elevation desert riparian habitat and the populations of breeding and migratory birds that depend on it. |
| Current Habitat Conservation, Planning, and Management | Tucson Audubon Esperanza Ranch conservation easement site is being restored to native gallery forest, mesquite bosque and upland |

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| Activities | habitats by the Tucson Audubon Society. Conservation easements are being sought for additional lands in the riparian corridor. Arizona State Parks and Trust for Public Lands are exploring land purchases. |
| <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>79.16 Riparian (<i>Gray Hawk, Common Black Hawk (migration), Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Bell's Vireo, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Lucy's Warbler, Abert's Towhee, Varied Bunting, Peregrine Falcon, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Yellow Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow, Gila Woodpecker, Rose-throated Becard, Thick-billed Kingbird, Purple Martin</i>)</p> <p>10.67 Semiarid/Sonoran Savannah Grassland (<i>Peregrine Falcon, Arizona Grasshopper Sparrow, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Botteri's Sparrow</i>)</p> <p>5.84 Agriculture (<i>Peregrine Falcon, Savannah Sparrow</i>)</p> <p>1.83 Urban/Residential (<i>Abert's Towhee, Gila Woodpecker</i>)</p> <p>1.50 Sonoran Desertscrub: Uplands (<i>Peregrine Falcon, Gila Woodpecker, Purple Martin</i>)</p> <p>1.00 Other (<i>Chihuahuan Desertscrub, Wash, Sonoran/Mohave Desertscrub, Mesquite, Mohave Desertscrub, Rock</i>)</p> |
| Related Habitat Accounts* | Lowland Riparian Low Grassland Sonoran Desert |
| Biological Description | <p>This IBA's boundary is defined by the riparian vegetation, including the mesquite bosques that border the broadleaf gallery forest. Overstory vegetation consists of Arizona ash, netleaf hackberry, Goodding's willow, and Fremont Cottonwood. Understory vegetation include desert broom, seep willow, burro weed, creosote, graythorn, wolfberry, cholla, prickly pear, and desert hackberry.</p> <p>The IBA's identified importance to regional bird populations is most evident in the substantial numbers and density of riparian-obligate avian species. Among the notable conservation values within this IBA is a concentration of nesting Gray Hawk, part of the broader population of the Upper Santa Cruz River watershed, which includes nesting birds along the Rio Santa Cruz in Mexico. Also of conservation importance is a concentration of nesting Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, most notably occurring within the Tumacacori area.</p> |

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| <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: Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Peregrine Falcon</p> <p>Tier 2: Abert’s Towhee, American Kestrel, Arizona Botteri’s Sparrow, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Black-throated Gray Warbler (migration), Brewer’s Blackbird (winter), Brewer’s Sparrow 9 winter), Broad-billed Hummingbird, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Bullock’s Oriole, Cactus Wren, Canyon Towhee, Common Black Hawk, Desert Purple Martin, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Elegant Trogon, Grasshopper Sparrow, Gray Flycatcher (winter), Gould’s Wild Turkey, Inca Dove, Gilded Flicker, Gila Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker, Hermit Thrush (migration), Hooded Oriole, Killdeer, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, MacGillivray’s Warbler (migration), Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Olive-sided Flycatcher (migration) Pacific Wren, Pyrrhuloxia, Red-winged Blackbird, Rose-throated Becard, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow (winter), Scott’s Oriole, Thick-billed Kingbird, Townsend’s Solitaire (migration), Verdin, Vesper Sparrow (winter), Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Western Screech Owl, Western Wood-pewee</p> <p><u>Federal Threatened or Endangered Species</u> Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo</p> <p><u>USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern</u></p> <p>National – Peregrine Falcon, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Bell’s Vireo, Lucy’s Warbler, Varied Bunting</p> <p>USFWS Region – Peregrine Falcon, Golden Eagle, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Bell’s Vireo, Lucy’s Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Botteri’s Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Varied Bunting</p> |
| <p>NABCI Bird Conservation Region</p> | <p>34: Sierra Madre Occidental 33: Sonoran and Mohave Deserts</p> |
| <p>Ownership</p> | <p>National Park Service and private land</p> |
| <p>Conservation Land Status**</p> | <p>National Historic Park and multiple conservation easements</p> |
| <p>Human Population Density</p> | <p>Rural</p> |
| <p>Legislative District(s)</p> | <p>Arizona Congressional District 7 and State Legislative District 21</p> |
| <p>NRCS Major Land Resource Area</p> | <p>53: Southeastern Arizona Basin and Range</p> |
| <p>Visitation, main access, and permits needed</p> | <p>Walking on the Anza Trail in Tubac is a great place to see birds. From Tucson take the I-19 south to the Tubac Exit (Exit 34), make a left under the freeway then another left (north) at the frontage road.</p> |

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| | Drive 0.4 mile north to Plaza Road and follow the signs to the Tubac Presidio State Park, just before the park entrance there is a sign reading “Anza Trailhead,” go right and park by the fence. |
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*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 |
|-------------------|----------|--|--|
| AZ IBA Surveys | H | Annual breeding bird surveys & Encourage eBird entries Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo surveys | <i>eBird focus species:</i> Gray Hawk, Lucy’s Warbler, Bell’s Vireo, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Tropical Kingbird, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting, and Varied Bunting |
| Nest box study | M | Lucy’s Warbler nestbox experiment | TAS led - ongoing |
| Sound Recorders | M | Wildlife Acoustics SM4 Sound Recorders installed to track migration | TAS led - ongoing |
| MAPS Banding | M | Banding station at Tumacacori NP | Include data for IBA |
| Black Hawk Watch | M | Volunteer spring migration hawk count | Include data for IBA |
| IBA Signage | | Install signs identifying the site as an IBA | Completed |
| IBA Dedication | | A formal recognition event | Completed |

Partners:

| Name | Role(s) | Contact Information | Actions |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|--|--|
| Tubac Presidio State Park | Manager | One Burruel Street Tubac, AZ 85646 (520) 398-2252 | Site and trails maintenance |
| Friends of the Santa Cruz River | River Steward | P.O Box 4275 Tubac, AZ 85646 | Advocacy, education and outreach, scientific monitoring of the river, fish, and vegetation |
| Tumacacori National Historical Park | Site Manager | P.O. Box 8067 Tumacacori, AZ 85640 (520) 377-5060 https://www.nps.gov/tuma/learn/nature/scriver.htm | Education and outreach, scientific monitoring of the river, fish, wildlife, and vegetation |

| Name | Role(s) | Contact Information | Actions |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Tucson Bird Alliance | Esperanza Ranch Conservation Easement | 300 E University Blvd # 120, Tucson, AZ 85705 (520) 629-0510 Tucson Bird Alliance- We speak out for wild birds and their homes | Habitat restoration on the river and adjacent uplands. |
| Anza Trail Association | Outreach and Access | 520.841.6944 http://www.anzatrail.org | Provides access for visitors and birders and can give ROE and/or permission for surveys etc. |

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 | Very Good |
| Semi-arid Grassland Birds | Good |
| Desert Shrubland Birds | Good |

Conservation Challenges:

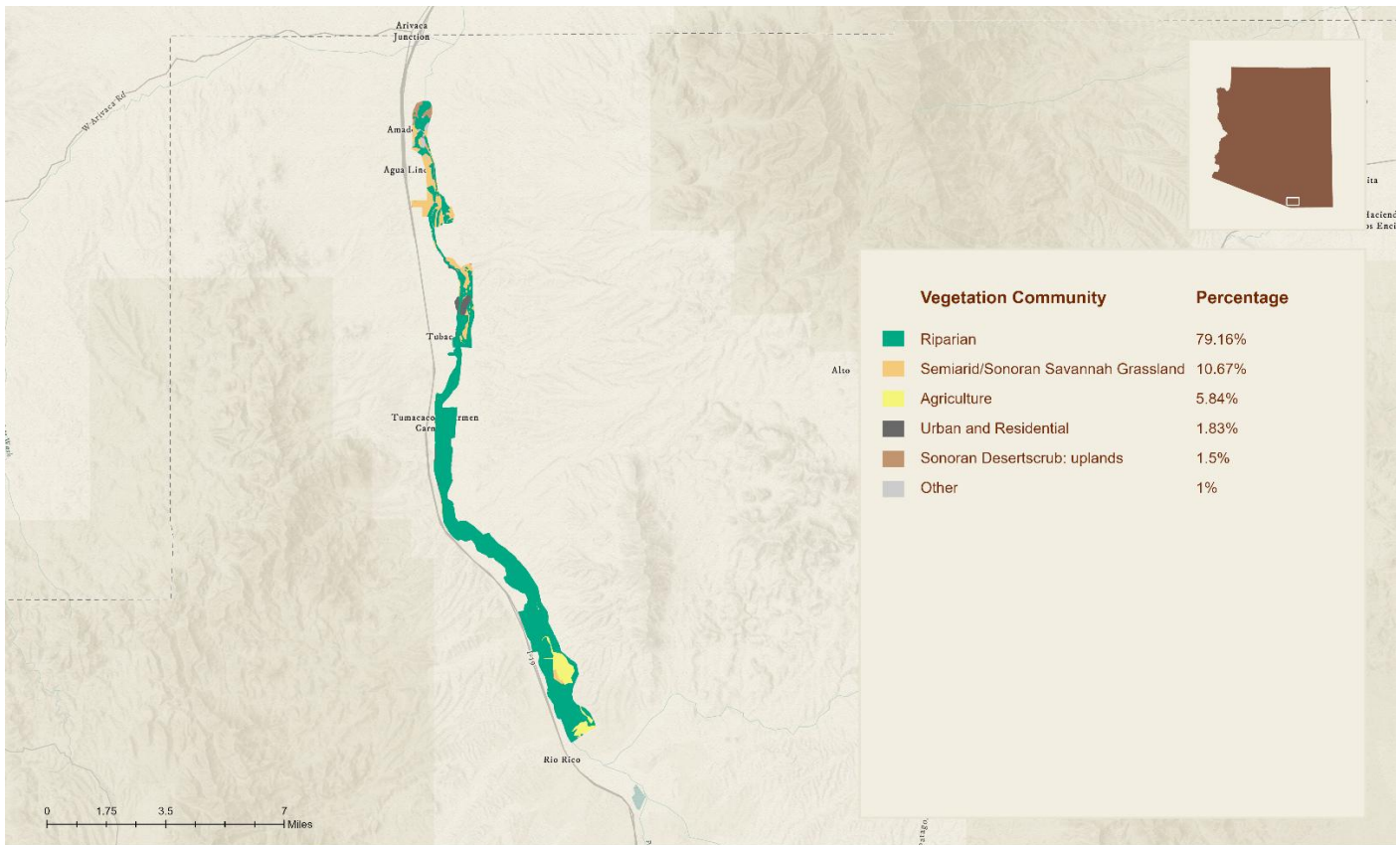
Conservation challenges are primarily human activities that immediately affect what we are trying to conserve. Through a Miradi process, it was found that pose the greatest threats to birds within this IBA.

| Challenges | Semi-arid Grassland Birds | Desert Shrubland Birds | Riparian Birds | Summary Rating |
|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Development | Medium | Low | High | Medium |
| Drought | Medium | Low | High | Medium |
| Groundwater Pumping | Low | Low | High | Medium |
| Loss of Effluent Water | Low | Medium | Very High | High |
| Summary Ratings: | Medium | low | High | Medium |

Important Bird Areas: Mini Conservation Plan Upper Santa Cruz River

Updated
May 2025

| 38) Upper Santa Cruz River | | Severity (1-3) | Scope (1-3) | Permanence (2-4) | Immediacy (Optional 1-2) |
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| Threats on National Database | | | | | |
| Disturbance to birds | 5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | |
| Forest Grazing | 5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | |
| Industrialization/Urbanization | 6 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| | Residential development | | | | |
| Invasive species | 5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | |
| Water Diversions (incl. impact dikes/dams) | 9 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| | Groundwater extraction | | | | |



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