

Willcox Playa/Cochise Lakes

IBA web pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> http://www.audubon.org/important-bird-areas/willcox-playa-cochise-lakes http://aziba.org/?page_id=712 Arizona Game and Fish Conservation Opportunity Area
Priority	Global
Qualifying Criteria	<p>Global: ≥1% biogeographic (N. Am.) population of a waterbird simultaneously; ≥5% over a season (Sandhill Crane)</p> <p>State: Site important to special-status avian species (Chestnut-collared Longspur, Swainson's Hawk, Cassin's Sparrow, Scaled Quail)</p> <p>Significant concentration of birds (Wilson's Phalarope, Willet, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Killdeer, Marbled Godwit, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Long-billed Curlew, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Snowy Plover)</p> <p>Significant concentration of birds (Sandhill Crane)</p> <p>Bar Charts - eBird</p>
IBA Polygon Center Point (Latitude, Longitude)	32.15°N, -109.84°W
Size	47,343 acres
County	Cochise
Local Communities	Willcox
Description	The heart of this IBA is the massive Willcox Playa - a broad, alkaline lakebed fringed with semi-desert grassland (primarily saltgrass and sacaton) and mesquite. The playa is seasonally flooded to a shallow depth. Outlying this playa are the satellite lakes and wetlands of Cochise Lakes (aka Lake Cochise), alkali flats, and Willcox Playa Wildlife Area containing Crane Lake.
Mission/Goals	To support populations of breeding, year-round and migratory birds especially significant concentrations of waterfowl, shorebirds, and Sandhill Cranes.
Current Habitat Conservation, Planning, and Management Activities	The Playa itself includes 23,000 acres leased by the U.S. Army to support missions at Fort Huachuca. It is not actively managed, and trespassing is prohibited. On the upper east side of the playa is the

	555-acre Arizona Game and Fish Department-managed Willcox Playa Wildlife Area. Management of the Wildlife Area prioritizes waterfowl habitat and provides hunting opportunities. Apache Station viewing area on the west side of the IBA is seasonally open.
<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>99.15 Semiarid/Sonoran Savannah Grassland (<i>Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Burrowing Owl, Scaled Quail, Snowy Plover, Sprague's Pipit, Savannah Sparrow, Botteri's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Cassin's Sparrow, Common Nighthawk</i>)</p> <p>0.67 Chihuahuan Desertscrub (<i>Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Common Nighthawk</i>)</p> <p>0.11 Riparian/Open Water (<i>Sandhill Crane, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Wilson's Phalarope, Willet, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Killdeer, Marbled Godwit, Solitary Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Long-billed Curlew, Red-necked Phalarope, Lincoln's Sparrow</i>)</p> <p>0.05 Urban and Residential</p> <p>0.02 Rock</p>
Related Habitat Accounts*	<p>Low Grasslands</p> <p>Lowland Riparian</p>
Biological Description	<p>Willcox Playa and Crane Lake, within the northern portion of the Sulphur Springs Valley of Southeast Arizona, supports the second largest over-wintering concentration of Sandhill Cranes in Arizona, typically 4,000 to 9,000 birds. Crane numbers are typically 5,000 to 8,000 birds using the Playa, and another 4,000 to 5,000 birds using Crane Lake. There are occasional years when crane numbers spike when a large number of birds (>13,000) from White Water Draw switch to roosting in this area. By the late 1940s the expansion of agriculture within the Sulphur Springs Valley (through the advent of groundwater pumping), provided the waste crop base (corn) to attract Sandhill Cranes to over-winter in the valley.</p> <p>Both in spring and late summer, shorebirds can stop-over in very substantial numbers at both the playa and at Cochise Lakes (numbering 400-800 individuals at Cochise Lakes). Small numbers of some shorebirds occasionally breed within the IBA, including American Avocet and rarely Snowy Plover. In addition, large numbers of waterfowl pass through and use Cochise Lakes, many species of ducks and grebes over-winter on the lakes in large flocks. In rare very wet winters waterfowl are found in huge numbers (>15,000, half of which are Green-winged Teal) feeding and resting within the Playa.</p>

	<p>The alkaline (mud) lakes are important to feeding shorebirds, and so are the margins of the Playa and Cochise Lakes. Peregrine Falcon and Merlin are frequently in the IBA in the winter preying on the duck and shorebird community.</p>
<p>Focal Bird Species</p> <p>Bold Type are Road to Recovery species</p>	<p><u>IBA Qualifying Species</u></p> <p>Global: Sandhill Crane</p> <p>State: Chestnut-collared Longspur, Swainson's Hawk, Cassin's Sparrow, Scaled Quail, Wilson's Phalarope, Willet, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Killdeer, Marbled Godwit, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Long-billed Curlew, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Snowy Plover, Sandhill Crane</p> <p><u>AGFD Species of Greatest Conservation Need</u></p> <p>Tier 1: Sprague's Pipit, Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle</p> <p>Tier 2: American Bittern, American Kestrel, Abert's Towhee, Azure Bluebird, Baird's Sparrow, Belted Kingfisher, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Botteri's Sparrow Broad-billed Hummingbird, Clark's Grebe, Common Black-Hawk, Common Nighthawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Gilded Flicker, Golden Eagle, Grasshopper Sparrow, Great Egret, Gray Hawk, Hooded Oriole, Inca Dove, Killdeer, Lincoln's Sparrow, MacGillivray's Warbler (migration), Mountain Plover, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Olive-sided Flycatcher (migration), Pyrrhuloxia, Scott's Oriole, Purple Martin, Red-naped Sapsucker, Red-winged Blackbird, Savannah Sparrow (winter), Snowy Plover, Swainson's Hawk (migration), Verdin, Western Screech Owl, Western Burrowing Owl,</p> <p><u>USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern</u></p> <p>National – Bald Eagle, Swainson's Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Snowy Plover, Solitary Sandpiper, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled, Godwit</p> <p>USFWS Region – Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Snowy Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Burrowing Owl, Grasshopper Sparrow</p>
NABCI Bird Conservation Region	34: Sierra Madre Occidental

Ownership	U.S. Department of Defense (Administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) and the Arizona Game and Fish Department
Conservation Land Status**	A small portion on the northeast side of the playa is a State Wildlife Area.
Human Population Density	Rural
Legislative District(s)	Arizona Congressional District 2 and State Legislative District 14
NRCS Major Land Resource Area	53: Southeastern Arizona Basin and Range
Visitation, main access, and permits needed	The majority of this IBA is posted “no trespassing”. Cochise Lakes are open to public access and a viewing platform is located at the smaller pond. The Apache Station viewing platform on the west side of the IBA is open seasonally. The annual Wings Over Willcox birding festival is held in mid-January. For more information about visiting the Willcox Playa Wildlife Area, which is located seven miles south of Willcox. https://www.azgfd.com/wildlife/viewing/wheretogo/wilcoxplaya .

*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
Bird Monitoring	H	Sandhill Crane Winter Count	Annual survey coordinated by AGFD, Provide volunteers
Bird Monitoring	M	AZ IBA Surveys	TAS lead- Encourage eBird entries
IBA Signage	M	Install signs identifying the site as an IBA	Installed at Cochise Lakes
IBA Dedication	Done	A formal recognition event	Completed January 2013
Willcox WA	M	Updated management opportunities related to Southline powerline mitigation	Coordinate with AGFD Tucson office Habitat Program
Water for Cochise Lake	H	Wastewater flows are changing	Coordinate with Willcox water department.

Partners:

Name	Role(s)	Contact Information	Actions
Arizona Game and Fish	Willcox Wildlife Area Manager and Wings Over	Region V 555 N. Greasewood Rd.	Management of Willcox WA.

Name	Role(s)	Contact Information	Actions
Department	Willcox partner	Tucson, AZ 85745 520-628-5376	
City of Willcox	Owens land at Cochise Lake and provides wastewater supply	Willcox City Hall 101 South Railroad, Willcox, AZ city@willcox.org and 520-384-4271	Maintain wastewater supplies to Cochise Lake
Arizona Electric Power Cooperative (AEP CO)	Owens site of Apache Station viewing platform	Apache Generating Station 3525 N. Highway 191 Cochise, AZ 85606 520.384.4256	Maintain seasonal access and O&M for viewing platform
Willcox Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture	Wings Over Willcox	1500 N. Circle I Road Willcox, AZ 85643 520-384-2272	Organizes annual birding festival
Tucson Bird Alliance	IBA Steward	300 E University Blvd # 120, Tucson, AZ 85705 (520) 629-0510 Tucson Bird Alliance- We speak out for wild birds and their homes	Primary contact for birding and bird conservation activities and volunteer opportunities.

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
Sandhill Crane	Very Good
Waterbirds and Shorebirds	Good
Waterfowl Birds	Good
Grassland and Upland 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 conversion of grain farm lands, groundwater extraction (over pumping), habitat fragmentation, and prolonged drought pose the greatest threats to birds within this IBA.

	Upland and Grassland Birds	Waterfowl	Sandhill Crane	Waterbirds and Shorebirds	Summary Rating
	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Medium	High	Medium	High	High
	High	High	High	High	High
	Medium	High	Medium	High	High

Willcox Playa / Cochise Lakes				Severity (1-3)	Scope (1-3)	Permanence (2-4)
Threats on National Database						
Abandonment Agriculture	Farm abandonment	7		2	2	3
Industrialization/Urbanization	Habitat Fragmentation	8		2	2	4
Water Diversions (incl. impact dikes/dams)	Groundwater extraction	7		2	2	3
Natural Events	Drought (Climate Change)	9		3	3	3

Willcox Playa / Cochise Lakes Important Bird Area

