

## Important Bird Areas - Introduction

### Arizona's Important Bird Areas Program Stretches Its Wings

by Scott Wilbor



Arizona's Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program has been in full flight since Jan. 2002. To update you on what we have accomplished its best to first review the beginnings and ultimate objectives. The Arizona IBA Program is a state IBA program, which was formally run by Tucson Audubon Society the program, has been handed over to Tice Supplee, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Arizona. Please contact Tice Supplee, Director of Bird Conservation (602) 468-6470 to nominate new IBAs or with any administrative issues, for science related questions call Scott Wilbor (520) 622-2230. Audubon State IBA programs are unique in that they are given individual flexibility to tailor their program strategies to accommodate the unique demographic, geographic, and political characteristics present in each state, while meeting the goals of the National IBA Program.

The IBA Programs goals nationwide are to:

- identify, document, and publicly recognize a state's most important areas for birds,
- engage people in citizen-science and avian conservation cooperative projects with land managers to benefit birds and their habitats at IBAs, and
- to partner with others to bring conservation tools and resources to IBAs in need of conservation.

The ultimate benefits from these endeavors are numerous:

- the compiling of information to help guide conservation of these important avian habitats,
- recognition given to the land managers whose habitat stewardship has provided for exceptional avian habitats and bird populations,
- the development of local site conservation commitment by people participating in citizen-science and habitat conservation projects,
- the enhancement and/or restoration of species of conservation concern, and
- the facilitation of long-term conservation of these most important avian habitats and their avian communities.

Additionally, we fully expect to benefit human communities as well, as healthy ecosystems are preserved around and within human communities, and economies benefit through eco-tourism dollars.

We are moving ahead on all these fronts in Arizona. So far, we have solicited grassroots nominations of potential IBAs from all of the eight Audubon chapters in Arizona. We received 26 nominations of potential AZ IBAs. We formed a Scientific Review Committee (SRC) of 14 biologists and avian experts representing all the geographic regions of the state. We expect three to four more nomination rounds, ultimately cumulating in 50 to 70 identified Arizona State IBAs, and a publication, "Arizona's Important Bird Areas."

We formed a Conservation Implementation Group of five conservation leaders to guide conservation strategies for sites in need of conservation. We have devised avian inventory & monitoring protocols, and habitat condition reporting for citizen-science at IBAs. We have promoted citizen-science avian inventory and monitoring and hope to have a site within each region being surveyed. We have or are developing cooperative projects with public land or wildlife management agencies. Additionally, substantial partnerships have been established with Arizona Game & Fish Department, Partners in Flight and The Nature Conservancy in areas of shared interest for habitat conservation. Finally, we are in the process of facilitating a private landowner's goals to conserve mature cottonwood/willow & mesquite bosque habitat in major migratory pathways.

You can be part of a team that surveys for birds at sites we are trying to get data for IBA nomination (check the list of sites to be adopted). Adopted potential IBAs will need to be surveyed between 6 and 9 times per year depending on location and seasonal importance to birds.

If you are a photographer of birds, contact the Arizona IBA Program for how you can help. If you are a writer may be you would like to write an article on one particular IBA and its conservation needs, call us for ideas. We also need some research and database help, so if that is your interest we probably can use you. The Arizona IBA Program is bringing together birders, biologists, land managers, and landowners. Through our cooperative efforts we will strive to make sure our most important bird areas continue to support the birds and habitat that we so much value in Arizona- you can help us soar! Give us call at (602) 468-6470.

## Important Bird Areas *Adopting & Monitoring IBAs*



### **Important Bird Area Stewardship, Individuals and Teams Needed**

Adopt an Arizona Important Bird Area. Conduct six to nine bird surveys with your "[IBA team](#)," or as an individual. Fill out seasonal habitat report cards for the land manager & site record. Participate in site-specific projects related to birds or habitat conservation.

### **IBA conservation and site survey protocols**

Yes, the IBA program is still pursuing Audubon members, birders, and others to nominate sites in Arizona as Important Bird Areas (contact the [AZ IBA Program at Tucson Audubon Society](#)). But, there also is an equally important way you can help Arizona's premiere bird habitats and birds, which is "birding with a purpose" at these special sites!! This is our avian monitoring program at potential or "identified" Arizona IBAs!

We want Audubon members in each Audubon chapter in Arizona to "adopt" IBAs within their region. We would like to form "site stewardship teams" (or individuals) to bird (i.e., inventory and monitor birds) at local IBAs, 6 to 9 times per year, and to report on site and habitat conditions for the land manager. Two to three people are an ideal team (but this ideal can vary with the site and habitat). From these surveys, we will collect important data to understand species distribution, abundance, and changes in site avian community composition at these most important bird habitats. Additionally, we may then organize or help implement various site improvement, protection, and education projects in cooperation with the landowner or manager's land management objectives.

What is an IBA? It is an ecologically discrete, conservation feasible, and management scale appropriate area of land. It must meet specific bird and habitat criteria set by the Arizona IBA Scientific Review Committee. National Audubon and its IBA National Technical Committee provide program guidance, and review of sites for National and Continental IBA status. Arizona IBA qualification specifics can be obtained under the Nomination section of this web site.

### **Arizona IBA Bird Survey Protocol:**

The monitoring protocol we are following comes from the U.S. Forest Service, General Tech. report PSW-GTR-144, "Handbook of Field Methods for Monitoring Landbirds," C.J. Ralph et al. 1993, and is used by the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, and many other inventory and monitoring programs throughout the U.S.

The type of survey is called the "Area Search Survey." This type of survey works well for intermediate birders through advanced, remains applicable across seasons, is not rigid in its application, yet still remains robust in its ability to document gross changes in bird abundance and composition over time. It is most often the best type of survey for diverse areas across Arizona, and therefore the preferred survey type for the Arizona IBA Program.

The "Point Count Survey" method can be applicable in some situations (thick, dense habitat), but only if advanced birders are available who are capable of identifying the majority of birds encountered by both song and calls. Therefore, the point count survey will not be a primary survey protocol.

We are promoting three area search plots in the primary habitat zone of a site; these three plots could be 400 meters along the creek (or through the forest or desert) by 150 meters in width (6 hectares total), separated by 600 meters of less-intensive "supplemental" observations. We suggest 40 minutes of search time in each plot, where you are free to traverse through the plot in what you feel is a comprehensive search providing a bird inventory of the plot. Plots may be reduced in size to 200 meters long by 150 meters in width, and separated by 300 m of less-intensive "supplemental" observations if constrained by property boundaries, or the local geography. The time used for the 200-meter long block area search, should be correspondingly reduced to 20 minutes.

Using this method birds can be tracked down, and quiet birds can be found by actively searching them out. The search time can be stopped and restarted for short breaks to consult a bird book for difficult to identify

birds. The 600 meter walk between plots (the "supplemental" count) is not timed, nor designed to be comprehensive, but is a repeatable walking survey, otherwise known as a transect survey, along a set path to your next search plot. "New birds", not encountered in the previous plot should be recorded, along with all nesting raptors, and nesting territories of "special status birds", e.g., [Endangered or Threatened, Arizona State Threatened birds](#), [Arizona Partners in Flight Priority birds](#), or [Arizona Audubon WatchList Species](#). This protocol may be revised as it gets used more. We will want your input after you complete an initial survey, so we can improve its design for use in other areas as well. You will likely want a GPS to set up where your plots will start and stop (a tape measure or measuring wheel can work too, but is more labor intensive); likely, you can estimate the 150 m width. If you feel habitat stratification is necessary or desired, try separate plots, maybe 200 m in length (3), be established in the other dominant habitat(s) within the site.

We generally suggest:

- 1 survey during peak fall migration (last week of August through the third week of September),
- 1 survey in late January,
- 3 surveys during peak spring migration/early nesting period (last 1/3 of April through the third week of May, spaced at least one week apart), and
- 2 surveys in the later nesting period (mid to late July post-monsoon initiation, spaced at least one week apart).

These can be adjusted with your local knowledge of the importance of your area for migration, wintering, or nesting.

An IBA Stewardship Report Card should also be filled out once per season, this will provide (coarse) information on present and changing habitat conditions at the site.

#### **List of Identified Arizona IBAs**

Sites officially identified as Important Bird Areas under the Arizona IBA Program (as of January 29, 2004) are:

1. San Pedro River National Conservation Area
2. Salt-Verde Ecosystem (Saguaro Lake north through the Mazatzal Wilderness)
3. Salt-Lower Gila Ecosystem (from 83rd Ave. Phoenix to the Gillespie Dam)
4. Tuzigoot (Peck's Lake/Tavasci Marsh/Verde River Greenway)
5. Watson and Willow Lakes (and provisionally the Granite Dells/upland habitat)
6. Grand Canyon National Park—Lipan and Yaki Raptor Migration Points
7. Imperial Reservoir
8. Mittry Lake State Wildlife Area
9. Lower Oak Creek (Formerly "Page Springs Fish Hatchery")
10. Arivaca Cienega/Arivaca Creek
11. California Gulch, Coronado National Forest
12. Upper Little Colorado River Watershed
13. Marble Canyon
14. Chiricahua Mountains
15. Santa Rita Mountains
16. Sycamore Canyon
17. Sabino and Lower Bear Creek
18. Audubon Appleton-Whittell Audubon Research Ranch
19. Huachuca Mountains
20. Boyce Thompson Arboretum/Arnett-Queen Creeks
21. Agua Fria National Monument Riparian Corridors
22. Blue River Complex
23. Anderson Mesa
24. Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge
25. Lower Gila River Quigley Wildlife Area
26. Lower Colorado River Gadsden Riparian Area