

ARIZONA

OFFICIAL STATE VISITOR'S GUIDE

THE GRAND CANYON STATE

Tribal Land Adventures

TANGY, FROSTY,
UNFORGETTABLE
Margaritas

PLUS: Birding Arizona

- Multicultural Attractions
- Regions by the Season
- Annual Events • Maps

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ARIZONA
GRAND CANYON STATE

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THE Skies Have It

BY CHRISTINE MAXA

Flock to Arizona's riparian areas, festivals and inns to spy the state's impressive winged wildlife

Grab your  *life list* and bring your  *bins*. Arizona has phenomenal birding opportunities. Whether you're a  *dude* (or *dudess*) looking to join a guided tour at a state park or festival, a  *twitcher* heading for a backcountry hot spot or someone who wants to pack in a bird-filled weekend at a birder-friendly B&B: Get ready to add some  *ticks* to your lists.

Look for painted buntings in southeastern Arizona in late summer to early fall.
PHOTO BY TONY BATTISTE



BIRDER SPEAK

Groups of enthusiasts often create new jargon solely to use in their hobby, and birders are no different. Becoming familiar with these terms can help when you're birdwatching with the experts.

- **Big day/year** A time during which one spots or hears as many birds as possible
- **Bins** Binoculars
- **BOP** Bird of prey
- **Cripler** Stunning megatuck
- **Dip-out** Fail to spot a sought-out bird
- **Dude** Casual birder
- **Five more minutes** Standard phrase to beg more time
- **Life list** List of birds one has seen in one's lifetime
- **Lifer** A bird on the life list
- **LBJs** "Little brown jobs," or small brown birds that are hard to identify
- **Megatuck** Rare bird
- **Plastic** An escaped captive bird
- **SSV** Soul-satisfying view (of a bird)
- **Tick** New species on a list
- **Twitchee** Birder who travels to sightings
- **Zootie** Freak sighting

RIGHT Searching for the Mexican chickadee in Chiricahua National Monument.

FAR RIGHT Nearly 300 species of birds have been recorded in the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve.

BELOW Wings Over Willcox Birding & Nature Festival celebrates the magnificent sandhill crane.



WINGS OVER WILLCOX BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL

started cataloguing its avian life in 1889. You can log some *tijfers* while learning about the area's charismatic landscape and birdlife at the **Verde Valley Birding and Nature Festival** held in May at Dead Horse Ranch State Park near Cottonwood.

Arizona's longest-running birding and nature festival—and counted among the nation's best—takes place in the city of Sierra Vista in early August. The **Southwest Wings Birding & Nature Festival** shows off the area's huge diversity. Flora and fauna converge here from the Rocky and Sierra Madre mountains and the Sonoran and Chihuahan deserts, so your chances for a rare sight are big. In the fall and winter, you can join a tour to spot winter migrants with the nonprofit **Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory (SABO)** group.

In the latter days of autumn, tens of thousands of sandhill cranes and snow geese migrate from the continent's northern reaches to the Willcox Playa, located near the city of Willcox in the Sulphur Springs Valley. The **Wings Over Willcox Birding & Nature Festival** celebrates the wondrous seasonal event in January. You can also brush up on your little brown jobs (*LBJs*) and birds of prey (*BOPs*), since 20 species of sparrows and 15 species of raptors winter in the valley, too.

BIRDING FESTIVALS & GUIDED BIRD WALKS

Along Queen Creek, which flows among the ruddy rhyolite cliffs in Central Arizona, **Boyce Thompson Arboretum** near Superior provides a superb environment for 250 different species—*megaticks* included. Take an early morning guided bird walk or follow one of the self-guided paths that wind through native and exotic vegetation.

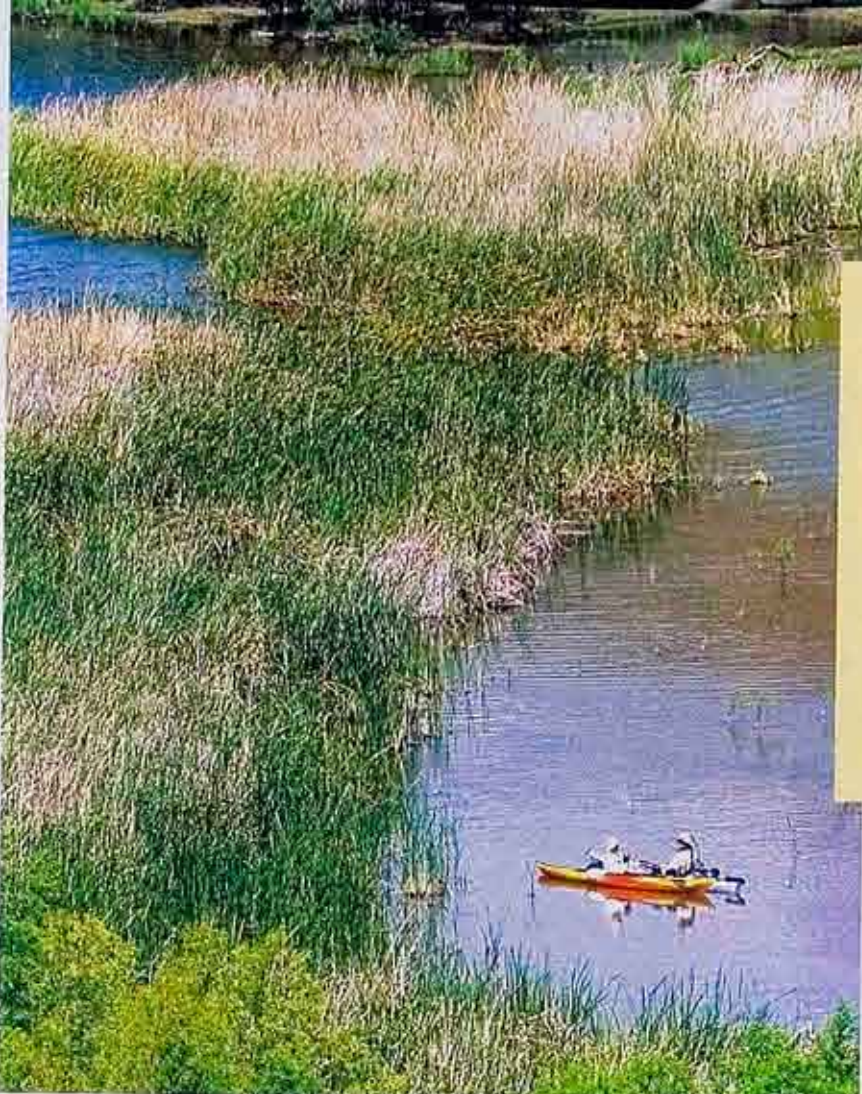
The Greater Phoenix area becomes a winged wonderland each winter, when thousands of migrating and resident birds gather in the metropolitan area's parks and riparian habitats. Stick around into the spring migration for Avondale's **Tres Rios Nature & Earth Festival** in March. It's a great way to learn about the three rivers (Gila, Salt and Agua Fria) of the region and the birds they attract, to climb aboard for a guided wildlife-viewing canoe trip, or to get tips from an expert on how to distinguish between sparrow species.

Birds flock to the handful of Fremont cottonwood-Goodding's willow forests in the state. The Verde River habitat has hosted 340 different species since Dr. Edgar Mearns



WINGS OVER WILLCOX BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL

KERRICK JAMES



FEATHERED FRIENDS

Want to know more? Reach out to any of these organizations for additional information about birding in Arizona.

Arizona Game and Fish Department
(602) 942-3000, azgfd.gov

Audubon Society of Arizona
(602) 468-6470, az.audubon.org

Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory (SABO) (520) 432-1388, sabo.org



YOUR ONLINE GUIDE

Share your best Arizona snapshots. Upload your vacation photos for a chance to win prizes at arizonaguide.com/experience-and-share/photo-contest.

BACKCOUNTRY HOT SPOTS

Arizona's abundant open spaces serve as bird magnets. Even if you *dip-out*, the charismatic scenery provides soul-satisfying views (SSVs) of the non-avian kind. This is invaluable in keeping a non-birding partner occupied during your *five-more-minutes* moments.

You might spot a *lifer* just about any time of the year at **Dead Horse Ranch State Park**. Its list of almost 200 species spans the seasons. In spring and fall, passerines flock to the cottonwood and willow forest along the park's Verde River Greenway. Come winter, bald eagles hang out around the trout-stocked lagoon. The Audubon Society has cataloged 167 species at neighboring **Tavasci Marsh**.

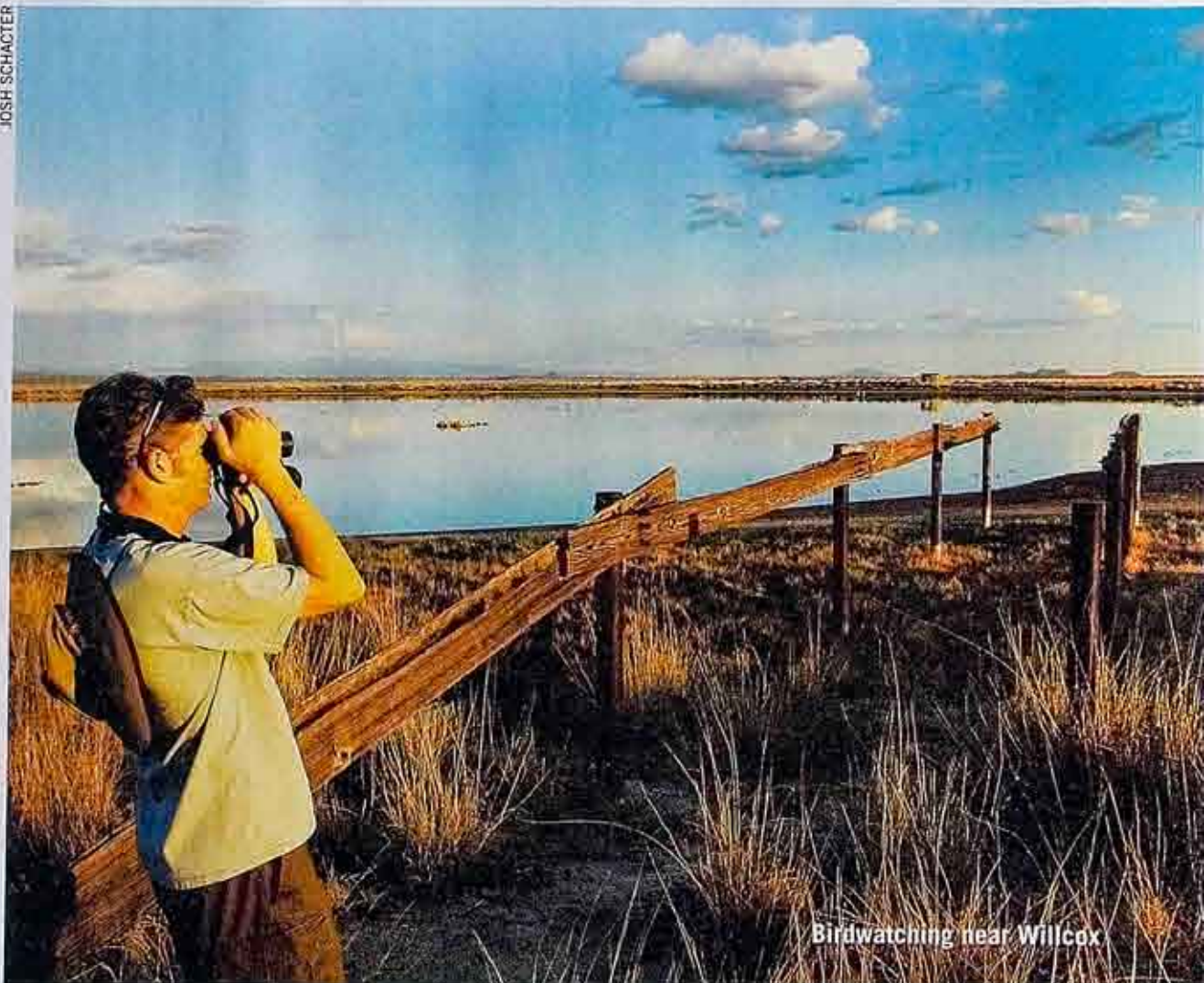
When most wintering eagles head north for their summer roosts, you can catch a glimpse of our national bird at **Woods Canyon Lake** on the Mogollon Rim. Arizona Game and Fish Department eagle biologist James Driscoll reports nesting eagles at the lake are producing enough offspring to eventually colonize the rest of the area's lakes. The forest of mixed conifers and meadows of wildflowers provide a picture-perfect place to spot dozens of high-country species on a summer's day.

You can't help but get a primordial feel when you walk the beaten paths beneath the leafy canopies of the

Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve in Southern Arizona. This wild, pristine place provides prime birding habitat, especially from March through September. About 300 bird species have been recorded here.

Nearby, the **San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area** has enough bird-life to make your *big day*—*zooties* and all. Almost 400 species of birds have been spotted among the riverbank's leafy galleries of cottonwoods and willows ranging to the uplands of the San Pedro River Valley. About 250 of these species migrate along the river, 100 nest there and 50 make anomalous appearances.

JOSH SCHACTER



Birdwatching near Willcox

WHERE TO WING IT

Birders' B&B Portal,
(888) 596-2557,
birdersatportal.com

Boyce Thompson Arboretum
Superior, (520) 689-2723,
arboretum.ag.arizona.edu

Casa de San Pedro Hereford,
(520) 366-1300,
bedandbirds.com

Dead Horse Ranch State Park
Cottonwood, (928) 634-5283,
azstateparks.com/parks/deho

Noftsger Hill Inn Globe,
(928) 425-2260,
noftsgerhillinn.com

Patagonia-Sonoita Creek
Preserve Patagonia, (520)
394-2400, patagoniaaz.com

Rio Salado Habitat Restoration
Area Phoenix, (602) 262-
6863, phoenix.gov/riosalado

San Pedro Riparian National
Conservation Area Sierra Vista,
(520) 459-2555,
sanpedroriver.org

Sedona Cathedral Hideaway
Sedona, (866) 973-3662,
sedonacathedralhideaway.com

The Southwest Wings Birding &
Nature Festival Sierra Vista,
swwings.org

Tavasci Marsh Camp Verde,
(928) 634-5564, nps.gov/tuzi

Tres Rios Nature & Earth
Festival Avondale, (623)
333-2400,
tresriosnaturefestival.com

Verde Valley Birding and Nature
Festival Cottonwood, (928)
282-2202,
birdyverde.org

The Wings Over Willcox Birding
& Nature Festival Willcox,
(800) 200-2272,
wingsoverwillcox.com

Woods Canyon Lake
Springerville, (928) 333-
4301, fs.usda.gov/asnf

The **Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area**, located two miles south of downtown Phoenix, offers a lush break in the desert with a restored segment of Salt River habitat. The oasis attracts more than 200 species of migratory birds that provide you with great birding moments from fall through spring. Keep an eye out for *plastics* here.

B&BS FOR BIRDERS

Just as some of Arizona's warm, green respites provide everything a member of the avian world would want, several of the state's B&Bs do the same for birders. **Casa de San Pedro's** location along the San Pedro River (in addition to its famous homemade pie) makes it a birder favorite. **Birders' B&B**, nestled inside Cave Creek Canyon near Portal, puts you right in the middle of a *crippler*-heavy birding paradise. **Sedona Cathedral Hideaway**, situated near Oak Creek, will wow you with hundreds of hummingbirds sipping at patio feeders on summer days, along with visits from dozens of other species throughout the year. Take a Friday night "class" at **Noftsger Hill Inn**, a former school



KERRICK JAMES

Birds can't resist the lush surroundings of the San Pedro River.

located in the city of Globe, to learn about area birds. The next day, you get to go on a "field trip" to find them.

One final thing about birding in beautiful Arizona—there's so much going on, even the residents say they can't do it all. That means you'll always have something new to do. How fun is that? *az*

Arizona author, editor and photographer Christine Maxa has written nine books on her home state and currently publishes the monthly e-zine, Foodies West, featuring chefs and food enthusiasts in the American West.



Ash-throated flycatcher

DIANE DROBKA, WINGS OVER WILLCOX

In Sedona, winged species compete for attention with the area's beautiful surroundings.
PHOTO COURTESY OF ARIZONA OFFICE OF TOURISM

