

Cibola National Wildlife Refuge Area

Habitat

- Farm fields (fallow and cultivated)
- Cottonwood and willow woodlands
- Mesquite woodland
- Riparian corridors
- Colorado River
- Lakes and ponds
- Marshes
- Desert scrub

Target Birds

- Canada, Cackling, Snow, Ross's, and White-fronted Geese (winter)
- Herons, egrets, and ibis (resident)
- Bitterns: American and Least (resident)
- Western waterfowl (migration and winter)
- Tundra Swan (winter)
- Eagles: Bald and Golden (winter)
- White-tailed Kite
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Falcons: Prairie and Peregrine (migration and winter)
- Merlin (winter)
- Clapper Rail (resident)
- Sandhill Crane (winter)
- Western shorebirds (migration)
- Lesser Nighthawk (summer)
- Greater Roadrunner (resident)
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo (summer)
- Burrowing Owl (resident)
- Woodpeckers: Gila and Ladder-backed (resident)
- "Southwestern" Willow Flycatcher (summer)
- Loggerhead Shrike (winter)
- Crissal Thrasher (resident)
- Phainopepla (resident)
- Western warblers and flycatchers (migration)
- Blue Grosbeak (summer)
- Lazuli Bunting (migration)
- Abert's Towhee (resident)

- Sage, Song, Black-throated, Savannah, Vesper, Lark, White-crowned, Chipping, and Brewer's Sparrows (winter and resident)
- Western Meadowlark (resident)
- Yellow-headed Blackbird (resident)

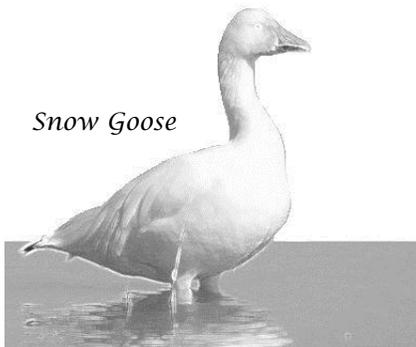
General Description

Cibola National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is one of several refuges strategically located along the Colorado River and heavily used by wintering waterfowl. The refuge covers 17,267 acres, two thirds of which lie in La Paz County. The headquarters has a fine visitor's center with interpretive displays and a lot of natural history literature, including maps and a bird checklist with 288 species. Summer hours (Mar to Sep) are M - F, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Winter hours (Nov to Feb) include weekends (Sat, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. and Sun, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.)

The stars of this refuge are the Sandhill Cranes, but not to be overlooked are the thousands of geese, other waterfowl, Bald and Golden Eagles, White-tailed Kite, Burrowing Owls, additional raptors, and a host of smaller birds. The season for cranes and waterfowl begins in November and comes to an end in early March, when they head back north. Nesting birds include the "Yuma" Clapper Rail (a freshwater subspecies of this rail), grebes, egrets, herons, Least Bittern, Lesser Nighthawk, Burrowing Owl, doves, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Phainopepla, and Lucy's

Warbler. Late summer and fall can be hot and humid, but beginning in late July, the southbound migrants begin to arrive, and you just might have the entire refuge to yourself!

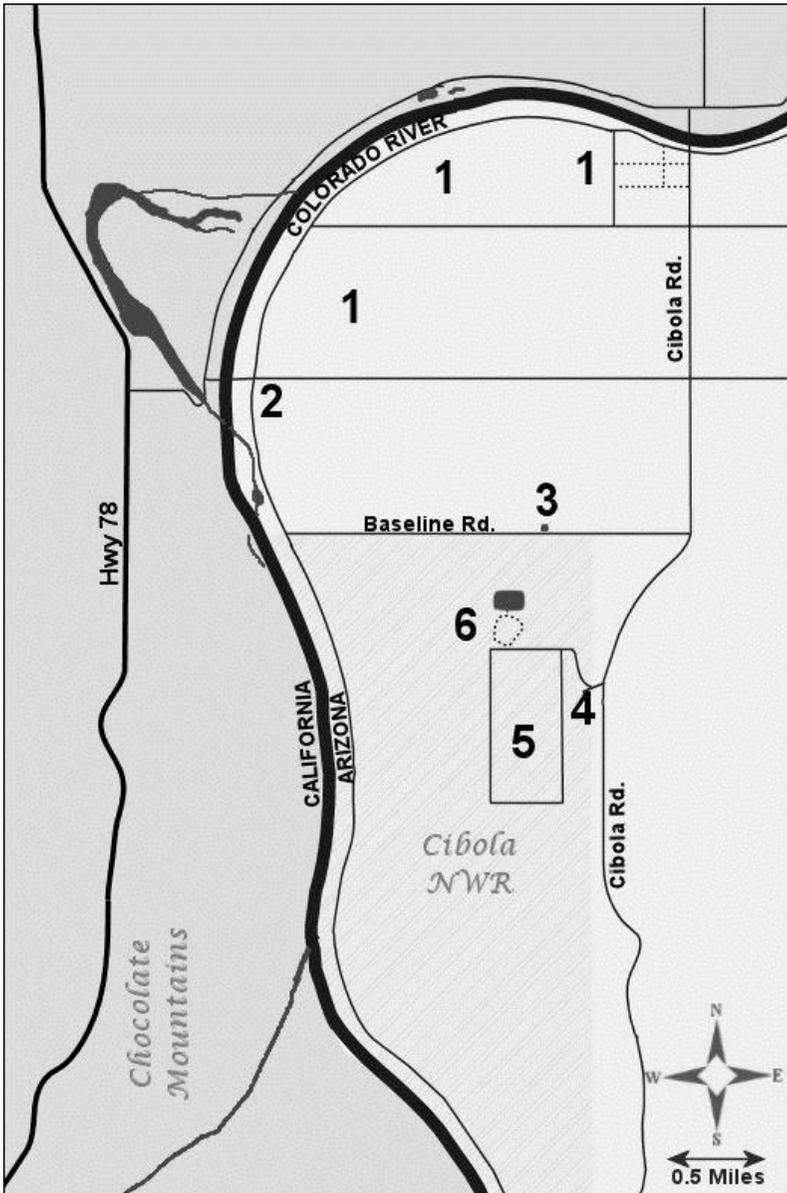
Snow Goose



North of the refuge are also a number of spots worth checking out in the Cibola Valley Conservation and Wildlife Area (CVCWA). These are remediation areas developed by the Bureau of Reclamation and other agencies as

part of the Multi-species Conservation Plan (MSCP). These include groves of cottonwoods and willows and areas of weedy fields, and have already seen breeding Yellow-billed Cuckoos and Willow Flycatchers.

The small community of Cibola has a large pond known for its breeding Wood Ducks and numerous wintering waterfowl—all very close to the road and providing excellent subjects for photographers. Driving the back roads and levees in this area usually turns up a wide assortment of seasonal waders, waterfowl, raptors, and passerines.



Northern portion of Cibola NWR

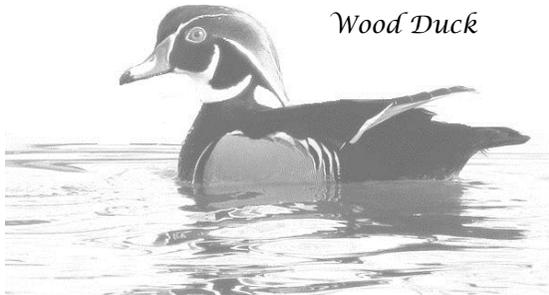
Birding Suggestions

1) Cibola Valley Conservation and Wildlife Area

This mitigation area saw its first development in 2006 by the Bureau of Reclamation and other agencies to create habitat for the “Southwestern” Willow Flycatcher, the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and other endangered species. Plans are for 1340 acres to be developed by the year 2017. The groves of willows and cottonwoods already contain mature trees that are attracting Red-shouldered Hawks, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Yellow Warblers, and Blue Grosbeaks in summer. Year-round residents include Great Horned Owl, Verdin and Song Sparrow. Winter visitors include accipiters, Northern Flicker and sapsuckers, and the ubiquitous Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers. Depending on the season, the fallow fields with weeds and bushes attract Loggerhead Shrike, buntings, and sparrows. A rare Cassin’s Sparrow was found here one spring.

2) Colorado River Oxbow

The oxbow returns to the river just before the bridge and should be glassed for gulls, terns, waterfowl, kingfishers, and swallows in various seasons. The vegetation along the Colorado River near the bridge is very good for resident Crissal Thrasher and breeding Yellow-breasted Chat. A new park on the east side of the oxbow can be a hotspot for migrating warblers, pewees, and other flycatchers in the spring. Summer brings lots of Bullock’s Orioles. There are two main levee roads that run south along the west side of the river (two on the east side as well) and go for 11.5 miles before they dead end between the old and the new river channels. A portion of Cibola NWR lies between these two channels as well. The Arizona-California state line follows the old channel of the river—so if you



Wood Duck

are working on your state lists, beware! Search all the backwaters for waterfowl, which often includes the beautiful Hooded Merganser.

3) Cibola

At the edge of the unincorporated community of Cibola, look for a small, easily-viewed private pond along the north side of Baseline Road, about 1.7 miles east of the Colorado River. The pond, which belongs to a local hunting club, has an island and nest boxes used by breeding Wood Ducks, joined in the winter by scores of Ring-necked Ducks and Canada Geese. Unusual birds, like Cackling Goose, sometimes join the hordes. Between Cibola and the Colorado River, watch the fields north of the road for Tundra Swans and Sandhill Cranes.

4) Headquarters

There is a short nature trail next to and behind the refuge headquarters that serves as an introduction to the local desert flora. At times there will be Black-throated and Sage Sparrows, and Verdin in this area. Behind the headquarters are a pond and several hummingbird feeders that should be checked.

5) Goose Loop

This 4-mile auto loop provides good access to most of the refuge's birds. It is open from ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset seven days a week. As you begin the loop stop at the first pullout on your right--Danner Lake. During winter look here for Northern Pintail, all three teal species, and other waterfowl. Since it is a shallow lake, many seasons will offer shorebirds (if there is water): Long-billed and, rarely, Short-billed Dowitchers, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Dunlin, and a variety of peeps. Occasionally there will be larger shorebirds like American Avocet and Marbled Godwit.

The alfalfa and other grassy fields everywhere along the loop offer a seasonal mix of birds. In the spring and summer look for American Kestrel (which nest in artificial nest boxes), Western Meadowlark, and both Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds. In the winter the diversity increases dramatically with the arrival of hundreds of Sandhill Cranes, Canada and Snow Geese, Mallards, and Northern Pintails. Look for the first White-fronted Geese to arrive in September; sometimes they winter. Winter is also the time for raptors; look for Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, and Peregrine Falcon as they patrol the field in search of dinner. Less common, but regular, are Prairie Falcon, White-tailed Kite, and Red-shouldered Hawk. Blackbird flocks usually include Brewer's, Red-winged, and

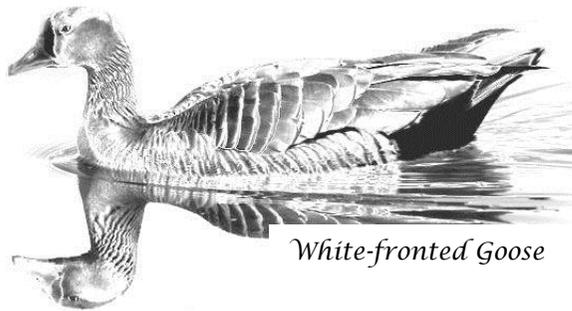
Yellow-headed. During “irruption” years you may be treated to jewel-like Mountain Bluebirds sitting on the fences and hovering over the fields.

Watch the weedy ditch banks for a variety of wintering sparrows, including Savannah, White-crowned, Vesper, and Brewer’s. Charismatic-looking Burrowing Owls perch close to the many artificial burrows created for them along the road.

6) **Cornfield Nature Trail**

About a quarter mile past Danner Lake is a parking area for the Cornfield Nature Trail. An informational kiosk and rest rooms are in the gravel parking lot. There is a pretty one-mile loop trail with a shortcut option. Your hike will pass through and along 36 acres of fields, brushy areas, honey and screwbean mesquite, cottonwood, and willow groves. At the far north end of the loop is a spur heading even farther north to a platform overlooking a large, 20-acre seasonal lake. In winter, when it’s filled with water, you may be treated to the spectacle of thousands of ducks, geese, and waders. Waders using the lake include Great Blue and Green Herons, Great and Snowy Egrets, White-faced Ibis and both Least and American Bitterns.

In the cottonwood groves are wintering Northern Flickers, and



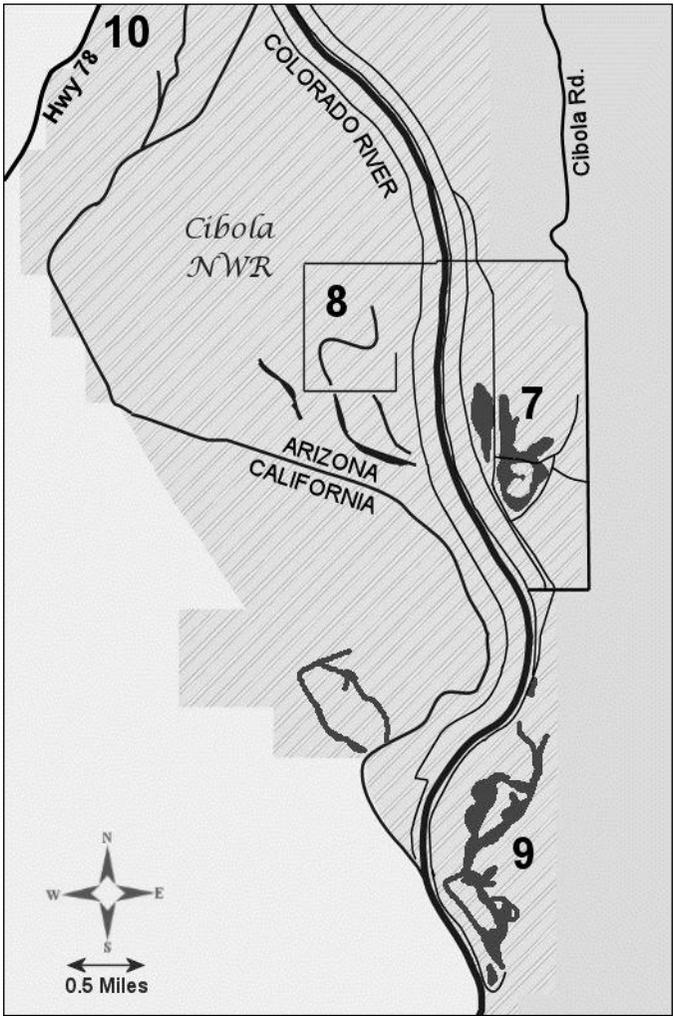
White-fronted Goose

resident Gila Woodpeckers and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers. Red-naped Sapsuckers visit during some winters. As these trees mature, breeding Brown-crested Flycatchers and Yellow-billed Cuckoos will become more common. Great Horned Owls and Western Screech-Owls nest, but are rarely seen during the day.

During the winter search the brushy areas for Verdin, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, House Wren, and Spotted Towhee. Less common are

Gray Flycatcher, Fox Sparrow, and Green-tailed Towhee. Along the field edges a common summer bird is the Blue Grosbeak. In the past several years Indigo Bunting has also become more regular in Southwest Arizona, so be sure to watch for it, too.

Migration is a great time to walk this trail, when you can spot up to nine species of flycatchers and numerous warblers, including MacGillivray's, Orange-crowned, Wilson's, Lucy's, Black-throated Gray, Hermit, and Townsend's. Every year a rarity or two will be spotted, and have included Palm Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Northern Parula, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. This is also a great place to see Blue Grosbeaks, Western Tanagers and Lazuli Buntings. During the summer, Mourning Doves and Western Kingbirds nest, along with an occasional pair of Vermilion Flycatchers. Depending on the time of day and the season, mosquito spray is highly recommended!



Southern part of Cibola NWR

7) Hart Mine Marsh

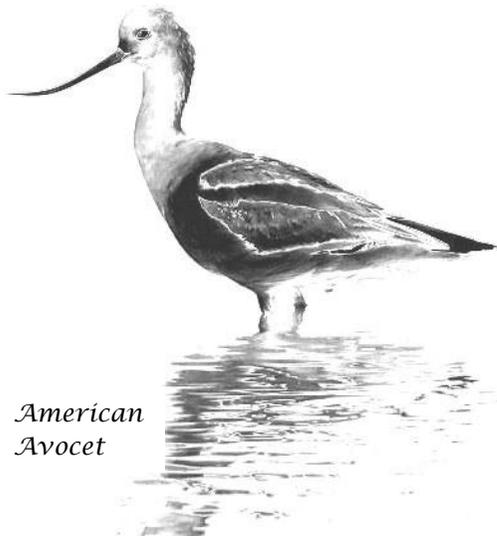
This beautiful, extensive wetlands area has exceptional habitat and is host to a number of great birds. There is plenty of open water (as of 2012) and even more extensive reed and cattail beds. During winter you're likely to spot American White Pelicans, a variety of waterfowl, and both soaring and hunting raptors. On early spring and summer mornings you can hear rails, grebes, bitterns, and other marsh denizens. Hart Mine Marsh is an attractive roosting area for waterfowl, herons, and egrets. The Yuma subspecies of Clapper Rail (which breeds in fresh water) nests here as well as at Cibola Lake.

Sharp-eyed birders may spot the numerous Least Bitterns, in addition to the much more visible Marsh Wrens and Song Sparrows. During early summer of 2012 I was fortunate to spot a rare Common Tern and a Black Tern feeding over the open water. Caspian and Forster's Terns are found during migration and in some winters. Along the muddy shoreline watch for common Black-necked Stilts and less frequent American Avocets. The canal on the west side of Hart Mine Marsh is an excellent spot for Green Heron (resident) and Belted Kingfisher (migration and winter).

8) Island Unit

In August 2011 a fire ravaged this area, wiping out all habitat and destroying culverts, irrigation gates, and roadways. Revegetation and reconstruction took place in 2012, and as the plants grow and mature, this unit will see a variety of wildlife transition through it.

Before the fire, the area had a combination of vernal pools, agricultural and fallow fields, moist soil units, and woodlands. Some of the birds seen here prior to the fire were White-faced Ibis, American Avocet, Black Tern, dowitchers, Black-necked Stilt, sandpipers, yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipe, egrets, Great Blue and Green Herons, Black-crowned Night-Heron, American and Least Bitterns, and White-tailed Kite. The best place to look for shorebirds now, until this area gets re-established, is Hart Mine Marsh and the Goose Loop Road.



*American
Avocet*

9) Cibola Lake

The largest permanent lake in the area, Cibola Lake always has some bird life to offer. Bald Eagles are often spotted here in the winter, looking for fish and slow coots. They are joined by Osprey and other raptors, and a wide range of waterfowl. The lake is closed to boats in the winter to provide a safe, undisturbed roosting area for wintering waterfowl and other wildlife. However, you can view geese, ducks, and Clark's, Western, Eared, and Pied-billed Grebes on a high cliff overlooking the southern portion of the lake. Five species of swallows and White-throated Swifts often hawk above the water during migration. The lake reopens for boating on March 15 and is a great place to bird from a canoe or kayak. The only motors allowed on the lake are trolling motors.

10) Western approach to Cibola NWR

Depending on how you drive to the refuge, you may want to glass the fields immediately west of the Colorado River, especially in winter. Several years ago we saw a pair of Golden Eagles eating a fallen sheep. Scanning the winter skies in this area will sometimes turn up both species of eagle and additional raptors. At other times we have seen Sandhill Cranes from Hwy 78 and the refuge access road. By following the dirt roads along these fields, you can often get relatively close to these magnificent birds. Please note that this area is in California!

Driving Directions to Cibola NWR Locations

From Highway 95 & I-10 in Blythe, CA:

- **Area 1 (Cibola Valley Conservation Area)**
 - Drive approximately 5.0 miles west on I-10
 - Exit onto S. Neighbors Boulevard (Hwy 78)
 - Drive south on S. Neighbors Boulevard for 13.3 miles to the Cibola Bridge
 - Immediately after crossing the bridge you'll see the Cibola Valley Conservation Area on the right (west) side of the road. Take the various farm roads around these plots to fully explore them.
- **Area 4 (Cibola NWR Headquarters)** – From the Cibola Bridge, drive 3.5 miles south on Cibola Road/River Road to the refuge entry road. The headquarters is a short 0.1 miles west on this road.

From Yuma, AZ (Intersection of I-8 and 4th Ave):

- **Area 2 (Oxbow Lake)**
 - Drive west 12.5 miles on I-8 to the Ogilby Road exit

- Drive north on Ogilby Road for 24.5 miles
 - At the CA Hwy 78 intersection, turn right
 - Drive east and north on Hwy 78 for approximately 25.4 miles
 - Turn right on a gravel road signed Colorado River/Cibola NWR
 - Follow this road 0.4 miles to Oxbow Lake
- **Area 3 (Cibola Pond)**
 - From Oxbow Lake, drive another 0.1 miles east to the levee road
 - Turn left (north) onto the levee road
 - Drive 0.2 miles north to the sign to Cibola NWR--turn right here and drive east to cross over the Colorado River on Oxbow Bridge
 - Immediately after crossing the bridge make another right turn and follow the levee road south 1.0 miles
 - Turn left (east) onto Baseline Road and drive east 1.7 miles to Cibola Pond. You can park on the side of the road to view the pond.
 - **Area 4 (Cibola NWR Headquarters)** – From Area 3, continue driving east 1.0 miles to Cibola/River Road. Turn right (south) onto River Road and follow it 1.0 miles to the refuge entrance. The headquarters is a short 0.1 miles west on this road.
 - **Area 5 (Goose Loop)** – From the headquarters follow the signs to the Goose Loop road, which starts just to the north. This 4-mile drive is open from half an hour before sunrise to half an hour past sunset.
 - **Area 6 (Cornfield Nature Trail)** – About 0.6 miles from the headquarters is a large parking area and kiosk on your right for the Cornfield Nature Trail.
 - **Area 7 (Hart Mine Marsh)** – The entrance road is approximately 5.6 miles south of the headquarters entrance on River Road. A large sign marks the turn. Turn right and drive west into the area for 0.1 miles. Turn left at the “T” junction to access the best sites and a loop drive around the southern half of the marsh.
 - **Area 8 (Island Unit)** – Drive 4.3 miles south of the Cibola NWR headquarters entrance on River Road. Turn right (west) onto Hart Mine Marsh Road and drive 1.4 miles (over the old Farmer’s Bridge). The Island Unit is on the west side of this bridge. Several square miles of irrigated cropland and fallow fields are accessed by dirt and levee roads.
 - **Area 9 (Cibola Lake)** – From the Hart Mine Marsh entry road drive south 1.2 miles on River Road. Veer right (west), following the sign to Cibola Lake. In 0.5 miles turn left (south) on the Colorado River Levee Road. Access points to Cibola Lake are at 2.8, 4.4, and 5.6 miles. This last access area, at 5.6 miles, is the southernmost

overlook. Turn left and drive up the hill to look out over the southern half of the large lake and cattail beds.

Site Notes

Best Time to Visit

- Sandhill Cranes usually arrive in October and leave in late February. This is also the best time for waterfowl and raptors. Early summer is the best time for some of the specialty birds like Yellow-billed Cuckoo and “Southwestern” Willow Flycatcher.

Ownership: Federal and Private

- Bureau of Land Management (Trigo Mts.)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Cibola NWR)
- Bureau of Reclamation (mitigation areas)
- Private (surrounding agricultural lands & Cibola Pond)

Vehicle Access

- Refuge and river levee roads are fine for 2-wheel drive
- Some farm roads and ditch banks may require high clearance or 4-wheel drive, especially after rains

Fees: None

Camping

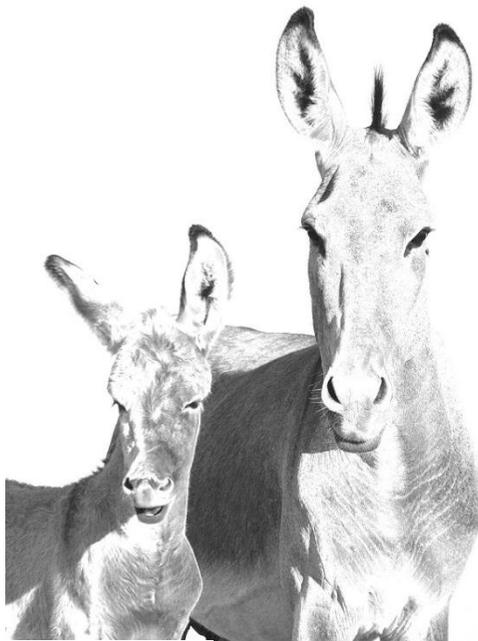
- Not allowed on Cibola NWR
- Allowed on adjoining BLM lands

Restrooms

- Refuge headquarters and Cornfield Nature Trail parking lot

Food: Palo Verde, CA and Cibola, AZ

Gas: Palo Verde, CA (expensive)



Wild Burros