

## **Yuma East Wetlands to River Mile 33**

### **Habitat**

- Farm and fallow fields
- Cottonwood and willow groves
- Citrus groves
- Riparian corridors
- Colorado River
- Ponds and lakes
- Marshes

### **Target Birds**

- Tundra Swan (rare winter)
- Cinnamon Teal (common resident)
- Western waterfowl (common winter)
- Bitterns: Least (common resident) and American (rare winter)
- Herons: Black-crowned Night, Green, and Great Blue (common resident)
- Egrets: Snowy and Great (common resident), Reddish (rare summer and fall)
- White-faced Ibis (common visitor year-round)
- Osprey (common winter)
- Accipiters: Cooper's (common winter) and Sharp-shinned (uncommon winter) Hawks
- Falcons (uncommon winter)
- Rails: Clapper (common resident) and Black (rare resident), Virginia, Sora (common winter)
- Black-necked Stilt (common resident)
- Western shorebirds (migration, winter)
- Belted Kingfisher (common winter)
- Greater Roadrunner (common resident)
- Sapsuckers (uncommon winter)
- Woodpeckers: Ladder-backed and Gila (common resident)
- Northern Flicker (common winter)
- Crissal Thrasher (common resident)
- Ash-throated Flycatcher (common summer resident, rare in winter)
- Gray Flycatcher (uncommon winter)
- Vermilion Flycatcher (uncommon winter)
- Loggerhead Shrike (common winter)
- Vireos: Bell's (common summer), Cassin's and Plumbeous Vireos (uncommon migration and winter)
- Swallows: Tree (common winter), Violet-green (rare migration), Northern Rough-winged (common resident), Bank (uncommon migrant), Cliff (abundant summer), and Barn (common migrant)
- Crissal Thrasher (common resident)
- Western warblers (common migration and winter)
- Towhee: Abert's (common resident) and Green-tailed (uncommon winter)
- Sparrows: Song (common resident), Savannah, Vesper, Lark, White-crowned, and Brewer's (winter)
- Blue Grosbeak (common summer)
- Lazuli Bunting (common migrant)

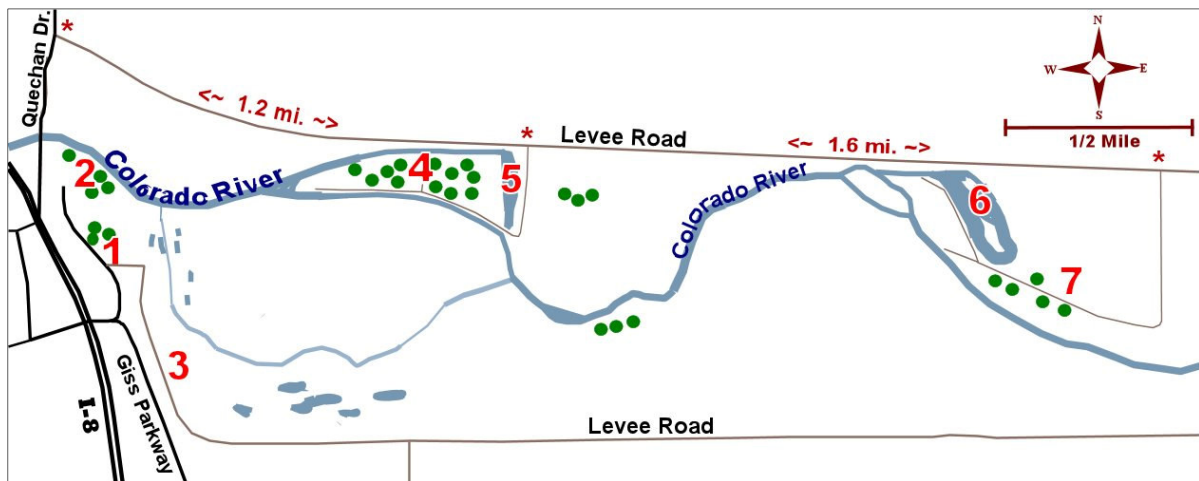
- Yellow-headed Blackbird (common summer)
- Orioles: Bullock's (common summer) and Hooded (uncommon summer)
- Goldfinches: Lesser (common resident), Lawrence's (rare irruptive), and American (rare)

## General Description

This area has a combination of wetlands, the Colorado River and side channels, riparian corridors, mesquite and cottonwood groves, and surrounding agricultural fields. Due to changes in the flow of the river since the state boundaries were first drawn, all of this area lies within Arizona, including a strip of land north of the Colorado River. The river acts as a natural corridor for waterfowl and other birds, so the potential for uncommon birds and rarities is high.

As you walk the trails watch the skies for soaring Osprey (common) and Bald Eagle (rare) during the winter. Additional raptors, pelicans, gulls, terns, and other species also use the river as a migratory corridor, so you never know what surprises may appear.

In the scattered stands of trees watch for wintering Red-naped Sapsucker (common), Red-breasted Sapsucker (rare), and hybrid Sapsuckers. Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, falcons, and a variety of buteos come to prey on the multitude of birds and rodents. Sparrows are found in the marshes and weedy areas, kinglets and finches are present in areas with trees. This is also a fine place to explore with a mountain bike. Though not always present, be prepared for mosquitoes, which can be a bother in some seasons.



Yuma East Wetlands

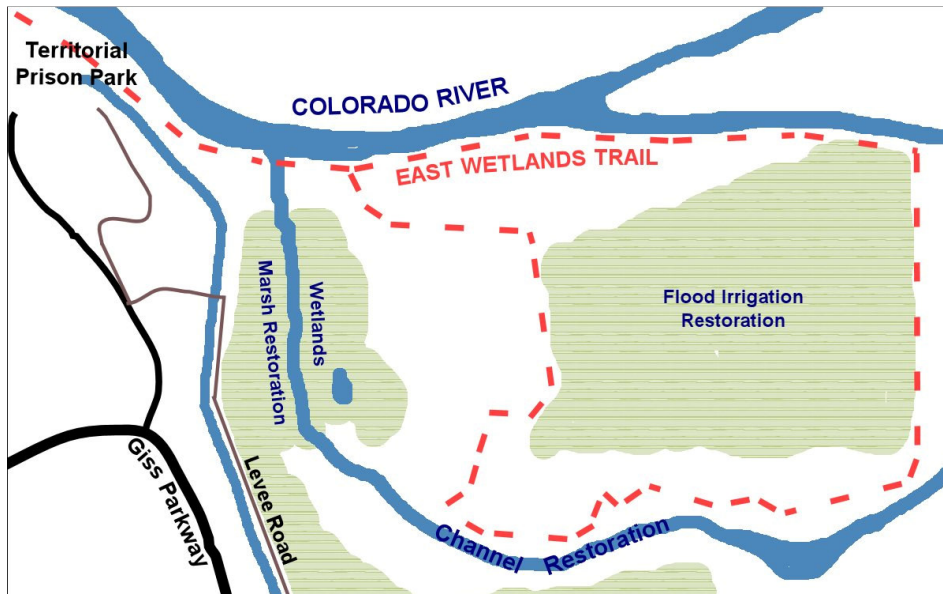
## Birding Suggestions

### 1) City Park below Prison Hill

The big eucalyptus trees, ficus trees, palms, and Aleppo pines attract dozens of Western Tanagers and Black-headed Grosbeaks in the spring, as well as hordes of Anna's Hummingbirds. This is also a prime spot for western warblers, especially for such a small park. Bronzed Cowbird is quite noticeable on the lawn in the spring. Summer breeders include Western Kingbird, Black Phoebe, and sometimes Hooded Oriole (which is also up in the prison yard up on the hill, in the Yuma Territorial Prison State Historic Park), in the California fan palms. Winter brings the regular slew of Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers, and sometimes a Vermilion Flycatcher.

## 2) East Wetlands Walking Trails

Drive past the city park and park close to the round-about at the north end of the parking lot. In 2006 the Bureau of Reclamation and the City of Yuma began to dig out the salt cedars, landscape the entire area with native vegetation (cottonwoods, mesquites, willows, etc.) and put in a new channel and ponds. Walk north through the gate in the fence to the billboard for the Yuma East Wetlands, where there is information on the wetlands and, at times, a plastic box filled with an “optimistic” bird checklist.



East Wetlands Hiking Trail

The mesquites, cottonwoods, and willows around the informational sign and at the beginning of the eastbound trail are a good place to look for migrants and summer breeders. In 2012 Bell's Vireo belted out its buzzy song every morning, usually joined by Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Lesser Goldfinch, and Abert's Towhee. Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning and White-winged Dove (except in winter), and Common Ground-Dove are common throughout the area, and are sometimes joined by one of the city Inca Doves. As you follow this 2 ¼ mile loop trail east it winds through and around marshy areas, cottonwood/willow stands, brushy fields in different stages of succession, and along the banks of the Colorado River. This varied habitat makes for good early-morning birding in all seasons.

## 3) East Wetlands Levee Road

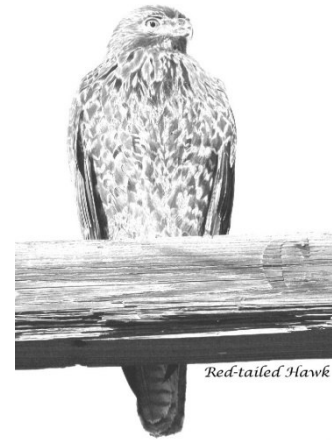
Drive or walk along this levee road and look west over the bulrushes, cattails, and open areas of water. Cinnamon Teal, Clapper Rail, Least Bittern, White-faced Ibis, Black-crowned Night-heron and other herons & egrets, Black-necked Stilt, Marsh Wren, and Common Yellowthroat can be seen or heard year-round. Virginia Rail, Sora, Long-billed Dowitcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipe, and Northern Harrier are some of the winter visitors. Occasionally someone will be fortunate enough to hear or even see Black Rail in this spot. In September 2007 a Reddish Egret joined the other more common egrets and herons for several months. Black Phoebe is very common here and in winter is often joined by Say's Phoebe and Vermilion Flycatcher. Loggerhead Shrike is often seen along the north end of the levee road. Look for waterfowl in the channel during the winter months. Swallows of all types make use of the marsh during migration, and Cliff Swallows breed under the canal bridges. Look for Yellow-headed Blackbirds, especially in the early summer, when they are raising young in the cattails. Once the levee road

turns west, you'll see a series of small ponds on your left; these were created in the summer of 2007 and have played host to shorebirds, moorhens, waders, and numerous waterfowl. The east side of the levee road is bordered by a canal, which is used by Spotted Sandpiper in all seasons but summer, and by four species of doves year-round.

After driving 1.1 miles along the levee road you will pass the boundary of the Yuma East Wetlands. After that it borders farmland, which can also be good for birdlife, depending on the state of the fields: fallow, weedy, alfalfa (all good), or hay, vegetables, corn, or cotton (not so good).

#### 4) Cottonwood Island

To reach this "island" drive 1.2 miles east on the levee road and then turn south on the road just past the lake at River Mile 31. Drive or walk (if the gate is closed) this road for about 0.5 miles to an access point on the south side of the island. Walk into the extensive planted grove, composed mostly of young cottonwoods. With many brushy areas, and thick reeds along the river and channel, there is a lot of habitat here. Summer residents include Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Blue Grosbeak, and Abert's Towhee. Once the cottonwoods mature, expect to find Yellow Warbler and Summer Tanager breeding and, hopefully, Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Migrants here run the gamut from flycatchers and vireos to warblers. Winter visitors include Red-naped Sapsucker and Spotted Towhee.



#### 5) River Mile 31

This lake was created by the Bureau of Reclamation as part of a mitigation agreement. It is surrounded by cattails and contains a fair amount of surface area. Depending on the season, you'll find cormorants, moorhens, rails, and waterfowl.

#### 6) River Mile 33

This lake was also created by the Bureau of Reclamation as part of a mitigation agreement. It, too, has large cattail stands and, depending on the water level, has mudflats and islands. It's the largest lake along this part of the river and regularly hosts a variety of waterfowl and shorebirds. Wilson's Snipe is common in the winter, and you may find concentrations of them on the islands. During migration look for terns and gulls, too. Unusual birds here have included Tundra Swan and Snow Goose.

#### 7) River Mile 33 Access Road

The road into the back side of the lake is Arizona State Trust Land and requires a permit to access, available from [www.land.state.az.us/programs/natural/recreation\\_permit.htm](http://www.land.state.az.us/programs/natural/recreation_permit.htm). Given that, you may find resident Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Greater Roadrunner, summering Yellow-breasted Chat and Blue Grosbeak, and all the usual western migrants. It's a quiet road to walk along in search of birds.

### Driving Directions to Yuma East Wetlands

- To reach **Area 1** from Giss Parkway, exit on the access road to the Territorial Prison State Park and follow the road down the hill to the green park.
- To reach **Area 2** from Area 1, keep driving north for a hundred yards to the end of the parking lot, and park close to the round-about. Walk north around the vehicle gate to reach the East Wetlands Trail and billboard.

- To reach **Area 3** from Giss Parkway, once again take the exit to the Territorial Prison State Park, drive about 0.1 miles, and then turn east just before reaching the guardrail. Drive east less than 0.1 miles and you'll drive over the canal bridge. Turn right on the levee road that travels between the canal and the wetlands.
- To reach **Areas 4-7** from Giss Parkway and the turn-off to the Territorial Prison, drive west on Giss Parkway for 0.2 miles to S. Gila Street. Turn north on Gila Street. After 0.3 miles turn right on East 1st Street. Follow this street for 0.6 miles over the Ocean-to-Ocean Bridge, up the hill, and past the church and Fort Yuma until you reach a turnoff to the north levee road (you'll see Paradise Casino straight ahead of you). The turn was marked "River RV Ranch" as of fall 2007. It's a gravel road, so drive carefully.
- To reach **Area 5** drive 1.3 miles east on the levee road; you'll see the small lake to the south of the road and an access road to **Area 5**. Turn right and drive south 0.2 miles to a parking area that provides easy access to the "Island," which is **Area 4**.
- To reach **Area 6**, drive another 1.0 miles beyond **Area 5**. This takes you to an overlook with a good view of the lake. Another 0.6 miles beyond here you'll see a road heading south (and then back west) from the levee that takes you to the south side of River Mile 33—this is **Area 7**.

## Site Notes

### Ownership

- Bureau of Reclamation
- State of Arizona
- City of Yuma

### Vehicle Access

- The levee roads are fine for 2-wheel drive.
- A 4-wheel drive may be necessary for farm roads and sandy roads leading down from the levee to the river floodplain. Indeed, if you explore some of the river-bottom tracks, expect very loose and silty roads.

Fees: Only if visiting the Yuma Territorial Prison Historical Park (really interesting!)

### Restrooms

- East Wetlands parking area
- Yuma
- Paradise Casino

### Food

- Many fast-food and fancy restaurants in Yuma
- Paradise Casino

Gas: Yuma