

10 Birding Locations in Southern New Mexico

This is a list of just a few of the favorite birding spots that Mesilla Valley Audubon Society members visit regularly.

NOTE: Always take more water than you think you'll need, but especially in the summer! At all times of year, a wide brimmed hat, sunscreen, and comfortable walking shoes are also necessities. We suggest using your GPS or map app to locate these locations.

State Parks

- 1. Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park:** This park has riverside and inland trails that host a wide variety of birds. More species are seen and more checklists are generated here than at any other location in Doña Ana County. The park also boasts a great visitor's center and museum that highlights much of what can be seen on the trails.
- 2. Leasburg Sam State Park:** About 20 miles north of Las Cruces on I-25, this park has two distinct birding zones. The upper one's trails wander through Chihuahuan Desert scrublands and are home to typical desert species. The lower, riverside area features two open park-like settings, a stroll through some thick foresty stretches, a closeup view of Leasburg Dam and a surprising variety of birdlife. There are hot springs in the river bed just south of the dam that ensure a year-round water supply. This makes it a great birding spot! Take the Radium Springs (exit 19) exit.
- 3. Percha Dam State Park:** Sixty miles north of Las Cruces, in Sierra County is one of the premier birding spots in the entire state. Coming from Las Cruces, get off I-25 at exit 59 and go to the top of the ramp; turn left, cross over the Interstate and go for maybe a mile until you come to East Grand Percha Road. Turn left and follow the road to the park. Just about any season of the year is good to excellent birding here. From migrating cranes and waterfowl to migratory warblers to Vermillion Flycatchers, to Zone-tailed Hawks, you never can be sure what you might see at "Percha".

City of Las Cruces Parks

- 4. Sagecrest Park and the area east of Las Cruces Dam:** At the corner of Roadrunner Pkwy and Frontier Drive, this small neighborhood park is home to a diverse bird population. From the park, you can walk out along a paved path into the desert and find anything from Cactus Wrens to Cooper's Hawks and lots more. Take the path to the pink manhole cover and cut south across the arroyo to a human made wetlands in the desert that uses reclaimed waste water. This pond and the surrounding area is always worth a look. You can also go to the base of Las Cruces dam and walk for a couple or so miles north on well-maintained paths, possibly seeing Burrowing Owls, various sparrows in winter and many other species.
- 5. La Llorona Trail:** This is part of the Statewide Rio Grande Trail. You can start at La Llorona Park on the East bank the Rio Grande just off W. Picacho Ave and walk south for about 5 miles to the Calle del Norte bridge in Mesilla, or start there and walk north. The trail is paved and provides views of the Rio and floodplain beside it. In the winter, Ferruginous Hawks can often be seen in the area both north and south of La Llorona Park.

6. Tellbrook Park: This hidden gem of a park is at 4290 E. Winchester Rd in Las Cruces. A paved walking trail loops around some lawn, some tall trees, and some undergrowth, all with views of the desert. A longer spur runs out into the desert. There is also a ravine with some dense vegetation and usually an abundance of birds. Some of the species seen here include Gambel's Quail, Northern Harrier, Northern Flicker, American Kestrel, Cactus Wren, Pyrrhuloxia, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Say's Phoebe, Curve-billed and Crissal Thrashers, to list just a few.

Southwest Environmental Center

7. La Mancha Wetlands: This often missed birding spot is about a mile north of the east side of the Calle del Norte bridge in Mesilla. After crossing the bridge, instead of turning left at the entrance to Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park (see above), turn right and drive along the top of the levee for roughly one mile. You will see an area of cattails, a small pond and several bat houses on your left. This is La Mancha Wetlands. There's a ramp down off the levee to an area where you can park. After parking, climb back up the ramp, cross the road, and slightly to your left is a vehicle track; follow it down the hill, and around to the right. From here, you can see the bat houses; head towards them. The entire loop is about half a mile. Great Blue Heron, American Coot, Chihuahuan Raven, Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, American Kestrel, Marsh Wren, Say's Phoebe are some of the year-round birds here. In the winter, White-crowned, Lincoln's, Song, and other Sparrows, plus numerous duck species are likely. In spring and summer, large numbers of Blue Grosbeaks are often seen.

NMSU Campus

8. New Mexico State University's bird friendly campus has two ponds, trees, grass, and cattle feed lots which attract a varied spectrum of avian life. From nesting Swainson's Hawks and hordes of Yellow-headed Blackbirds in the summer to winter wanderers on the golf course during the Christmas Bird Count, to Burrowing Owls by Aggie Stadium, the campus is rich in birding opportunities.

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument

9. Dripping Springs Natural Area: Look for White-throated Swifts and Rufous, Black-chinned, and sometimes Anna's Hummingbirds here in then summer. At all times of year, when the thermals are good, you might see raptors, and if you're lucky a Golden Eagle or two. Several trails climb up into the Organ Mountains where you could well see Canyon and Green-tailed Towhees, plus several species of Sparrows in the winter. Dripping Springs is worth it just for the spectacular views out over the valley.

10. Aguirre Spring Recreation Area: On the eastern side of the Organ Mountains about a mile below San Augustin Pass, the road to this popular area takes off to the right. It's about a five mile drive through some breathtaking scenery. In the winter, this road is
A great place to see scads of sparrows. The birds here are similar to those at Dripping Springs, but the habitat is more rugged and in a pinyon-juniper zone, so look for more species like Canyon Wrens, sapsuckers, and such.

Map of Birding locations around Las Cruces:

This map was taken from the eBird.org “hotspot” map for Dona Ana County. All the teardrop forms are eBird Hotspots. In yellow print are the Hotspots that are described on the prior pages. For specific travel directions use GOOGLE Maps or the Hotspot section of eBird, Dona Ana County.



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