

Vicksburg Farm

County: La Paz

Nearest Town: Quartzsite

Habitat

- Irrigation ponds
- Marsh
- Waste water ponds
- Agricultural fields
- Desert brush
- Mesquite and salt cedar fencerows

Target Birds

- Teal: Cinnamon (resident), Green-winged (migration), and Blue-winged (migration)
- Gambel's Quail (resident)
- Pied-billed Grebe (resident)
- Greater Roadrunner (resident)
- Lesser Nighthawk (summer)
- Mountain Plover (winter)
- Black-necked Stilt (resident)
- American Avocet (migration)
- Sandpipers (migration): Baird's, Pectoral, Western, Least, and Solitary
- Dowitchers (migration): Long-billed and Short-billed (rare)
- Yellowlegs: Lesser (migration) and Greater (migration and winter)
- Phalaropes (migration): Wilson's and Red-necked
- **White-faced Ibis** (summer)
- Hawks: Swainson's (migration), Ferruginous (migration), and Red-tailed (resident)
- Northern Harrier (winter)
- Falcons: Prairie (winter) and American Kestrel (resident)
- Phoebes (resident): Black and Say's
- Loggerhead Shrike (resident)
- Common Raven (resident)
- Horned Lark (winter)
- Phainopepla (resident)
- Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (summer)
- Thrashers: Sage (winter and spring) and Crissal (resident)
- Bluebirds: Western and Mountain Bluebirds (irruptive in winter)
- Lesser Goldfinch (migration)

- Sparrows: Vesper, Savannah, Brewer's and Sage (winter), and Abert's Towhee (resident)
- Blackbirds (resident): Yellow-headed and Red-winged
- Warblers: Yellow-rumped (winter), Orange-crowned (migration and winter), and Common Yellowthroat (resident)

General Description

While this area of southwest Arizona, with its desert scrub, desert mountains, and agricultural areas is not usually thought of as an Arizona birding destination, it does have many excellent birds, especially during migration and in winter, and frequent visits to the area will turn up rarities. Highway 60 runs through the heart of McMullen Valley, which was first settled by miners, and then by farmers. Agriculture now predominates in the valley, bordered on the south by the Harquahala Mountains and on the north by the Harcuvar Mountains. The highest peaks in these two mountain chains have had breeding Rufous-crowned and Black-chinned Sparrows, especially after wet winters. In the winter the fields attract a wealth of raptors, bluebirds, and sparrows. The desert washes and mountains have the typical resident community of Gambel's Quail, Western Screech-Owl, Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Loggerhead Shrike, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Phainopepla, and Curve-billed Thrashers.

Vicksburg Farm is a huge oasis in this desert, and attracts a plethora of shorebirds and other migrants in the spring and fall. This farm is owned by the same gentleman who runs the Aztec Feedlot, and as of 2022, welcomes birders. The permanent irrigation ponds are magnets for waterfowl, waders,

Mountain Bluebird



plovers, sandpipers, the occasional tern and gull, migrating passerines, and thirsty desert residents. These extensive fields see cultivation twelve months out of the year. In winter check the grassy and fallow fields for Long-billed Curlew, Mountain Plover, Mountain and Western Bluebirds (irruption years), and both Vesper and Savannah Sparrows. Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Western Meadowlark, and Horned Larks all breed. Winter brings a number of raptors, chiefly Red-tailed and Ferruginous Hawks, Northern Harrier, and Prairie Falcon. Also keep an eye out for rare longspurs.



Vicksburg Farm

Birding Suggestions

1) North Pond

GPS Coordinates: 33.680655, -113.775833

At the southwest corner of the southernmost cattle feedlot is the smaller of the two “semi permanent” ponds. During trips here in mid August, and then again at the beginning of September, I had 15 species of shorebirds each time, including Willet, Marbled Godwit, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Red-necked Phalarope. The week following my August visit Brian added rare Semipalmated and Stilt Sandpipers. Check the surrounding fields for resident Horned Lark and Western Meadowlark. During winter watch for raptors, pipits, bluebirds, and sparrows.

Directions

From the intersection of I-10 and Vicksburg Road (26 miles east of the center of Quartzsite)

- Drive north on Vicksburg road for 2.9 miles.

- Turn left on the dirt farm road and drive west for 0.5 miles.
- Turn right and drive north for 0.3 miles; the first pond will be on your right. (This pond had plenty of water in it during 2021.)

2) West Perimeter Road

GPS Coordinates: 33.678466, -113.784472



This road has desert scrub and trees on the west side, which can be loaded with migrants, sparrows, and resident desert breeders depending on the time of year. It can be especially good for Sage Thrashers. The well-watered fields to the east of the road provide sustenance and the desert scrub provides cover.

If you follow the perimeter road a mile to the north (from the original turnoff), you'll come upon the cattle boneyard. This is a fine place to observe Turkey Vulture and Common Raven year-round, and additional raptors in the winter. Watch for rare Black Vulture and Crested Caracara.

Directions

From Site 2

- Continue north for 0.2 miles to the next intersection
- Turn left and drive west for 0.5 miles to the edge of the fields. Bird this road to the north for 2.0 miles or to the south for 1.0 miles.

3) South Pond

GPS Coordinates: 33.671667, -113.783613

Half a mile south and half a mile west of the north pond is a long, narrow pond that is partially surrounded by cattails, mesquites, and salt cedars. In November 2012 Suzanne and I spotted a Snow Goose, ten Northern Pintails, teal, fifteen Mallards, a Bufflehead, two Gadwalls, a Northern Shoveler, six Ring-necked Ducks, a Canvasback, a Common Gallinule, waders, several Northern Harriers, and a Marsh Wren in this small area. As of August 2021 the pond was being fed by a large pump, and the mixture of birds included White-faced Ibis, Black Tern, MacGillivray's Warbler, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and Lazuli Bunting. South of this pond, along the southern perimeter road, is a fine, dense fencerow of mesquites and palo verdes. These trees play host to a selection of passerines; fall migrants include Willow Flycatcher, Black-headed and Blue Grosbeaks, and eight species of warblers. In winter the cattails are brimming with Song Sparrows and Marsh Wrens.

Directions

From Site 1

- Continue north for 0.2 miles to the next intersection
- Turn left and drive west for 0.5 miles to the edge of the fields
- Turn left on the farm road and drive south for 0.5 miles.
- Continue south by jogging around the water pump to get on the east side of the long narrow pond. Walk or drive along the pond, birding as you go.

4) South Perimeter Road

GPS Coordinates: 33.667594, -113.778863

The south perimeter road has more mature palo verdes and mesquites than the west perimeter road, so the birding is different. You'll find more vireos, flycatchers, warblers, and grosbeaks here during migration. Stop where ever you see birds, or just stop and pish in areas of thick growth. Abert's Towhee is quite common in the undergrowth, and I've never missed Greater Roadrunner along this route. Javalina are here, too.

Watch for flooded or wet fields on the north side of the road as you travel along it. Migrant shorebirds and waterfowl, and wintering raptors and sparrows, make frequent use of the habitat. Especially in November, look for rare Lapland and Thick-billed Longspurs on their own, or mixed in with Horned Lark flocks. Caleb Strand and company had both species in late Jan 2022 in a dirt field just west of South Pond; I was able to refind them the next day.



*Ferruginous
Hawk*

Directions

From the south end of Site 3

- The perimeter road goes east for about 0.7 miles and then jogs north before going east another 0.3 miles to Vicksburg Road.
- The road also goes west for 1.0 miles to the edge of the creosote desert

Site Notes

Ownership

- Private

Vehicle Access

- The well-maintained farm roads are accessible by automobile except after excessive rains. After rains watch for standing water, mud, and washouts.

Fees

- None

Restrooms

- Salome and Vicksburg service stations

Camping

- Several RV courts along Hwy 60
- Primitive camping in BLM lands

Lodging

- Quartzsite
- Salome

Food

- Salome (east on Hwy 60)
- Vicksburg (just west on Hwy 60)
- Vicksburg service stations off I-10

Gas

- Salome (expensive)
- Vicksburg Road and I-10 junction

Notes

- About 20 minutes to the northeast is Centennial Park, which can be worth a stop in the winter. A short write-up of this site is in the Miscellaneous Sites chapter at the end of this book.