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Southwestern New Mexico Audubon Society

A chapter of the
National Audubon Society

Birding Locations in the Silver City Area

This guide is your introduction to birding locations in and around Silver City and Grant County, New Mexico. At most locations little walking is required and birding can be done near where you park your vehicle. Approximately 65% of the bird species in New Mexico have been seen in Grant County. The lush riparian habitat of the river valleys, the scenic mountains of the Gila National Forest, and surrounding grasslands offer many opportunities to see a variety of species throughout the year.

Maps: The map on this page indicates birding areas in relation to Silver City. Area maps are available at the Murray Ryan Visitor Center at 201 N. Hudson in Silver City and the Silver City Chamber of Commerce at 3031 US-180 in Silver City. Gila National Forest maps are available at the Gila National Forest office, 3005 E. Camino Del Bosque, Silver City, NM 88061, and at District Ranger Stations.

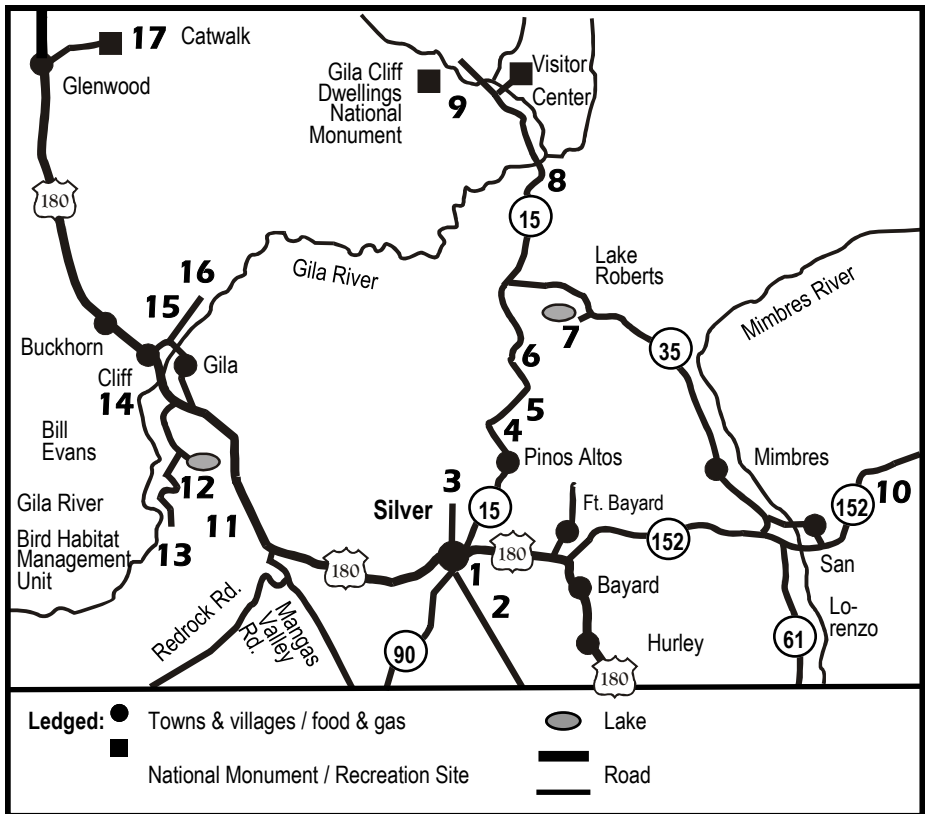
Reference guides: *Birds of the Gila National Forest Checklist* is available at all Gila National Forest offices and the Visitor Center.

Directions: Directions and approximate travel times in the following descriptions are from Silver City. The locations are on public lands and right-of-ways but there are some areas where roads are adjacent to private property. In such cases you can bird from the roads but *don't cross onto private property without permission.*

Roads and Cautions: Most roads are paved but there are a few dirt roads and forest campgrounds that can be muddy if there has been recent precipitation. At certain times of year weather conditions can change quickly, as can road conditions. Always carry adequate clothing and water. *Do not drive on muddy or water covered roads, or on roads that look in poor condition.*

Note: SWNM Audubon bears no responsibility for accidents, injuries, or loss from any cause for anyone using this guide.

eBird links: Many of these locations are eBird hotspots. You can check out the latest observations at the eBird links and find other information about the hotspot. The links are included for each location listed in this guide. (The use of eBird in no way implies Cornell Lab of Ornithology approval of or responsibility for information in this guide.)



Birding in & near Silver City

1. The Big Ditch Park in Silver City

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L140001>

Location: Near the Murray Ryan Visitor Center at the corner of Hudson and Broadway Streets. Stop at the Visitor Center to get directions to the Big Ditch entrance and information about Silver City and trails near the Visitor Center and San Vicente Creek.

Facilities: Restrooms at the Visitor Center.

Habitat: Riparian woods.

Description: Once the main street of Silver City in the late 1800s, this unique park was created by a series of floods in the early 1900s. San Vicente Creek flows through the Big Ditch and provides habitat for several species. Walkways along the creek are a pleasant place to bird. Take some time to also enjoy the historic downtown.

2. San Vicente Creek and the San Vicente Cienega Trail

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L2673862>

Location: In Silver City go south on Bullard St. Turn left onto Mill Street. Follow the street and park at the trail head sign beneath the Hwy 90 bridge. Walk down to the creek to find the trail heading east.

Facilities: None.

Habitat: Riparian woods with desert scrub on the hills along the creek.

Description: San Vicente Creek flows through the Big Ditch Park and continues down the valley south of Silver City. The trail follows the creek for about 1.5 miles. The creek is on town property, but private property borders the creek in some places so be aware of signage. This is a great location for year-around birding and is very convenient to downtown.

3. Little Walnut Picnic Area and Gomez Peak Trail System

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L955518>

Location: North of Silver City on Little Walnut Road. Little Walnut Picnic Area is on the left about a half mile past the Gila National Forest sign. A large parking lot on the left will give access to the Gomez Peak Trail System. The next left after the parking lot will give access to the picnic area.

Travel time one way: 15 minutes.

Facilities: Toilets, picnic tables.

Habitat: Ponderosa pine and pinyon/juniper/oak forest.

Description: This area offers great birding for forest species and is a short, easy drive north from Silver City.

Birding North of Silver City

NM 15, NM 35, and NM 152 make a scenic loop known as Trail of the Mountain Spirits. A drive north from Silver City on NM 15 will take you into the Gila National Forest and to the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. Forests, lakes, and river valleys offer a variety of habitats for great birding.

4. Little Cherry Creek Road

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L12395330>

Location: North on NM 15, about 2.5 miles past Pinos Altos and after milepost 9, you will see a “Little Cherry Creek Ranch” sign. NM 15 takes a bend to the left, but you will turn right onto the dirt road at the sign. There are several small pull-offs on the left-hand side of the road. It is not advised to drive further than the first available parking spaces. Park and walk up the primitive road.

Travel time one way: 20 minutes.

Facilities: None.

Habitat: Riparian woods, mixed conifer, and oak forest.

Description: This primitive dirt road follows a creek and offers great birding for a wide variety of species. It’s about two miles to the end of the road. In several places the creek crosses the road and the amount of flow depends on the time of year. Use caution crossing the creek during the late summer rainy season.

5. Cherry Creek & McMillan Campgrounds

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L748283>

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L281271>

Location: North on NM 15, between milepost 11 & 13. There are signs for each of these Gila National Forest Campgrounds.

Travel time one way: 30 minutes.

Facilities: Vault toilets, picnic tables.

Habitat: Riparian woods, mixed conifer, and oak forest.

Description: This beautiful canyon offers excellent birding for forest and riparian species. You can park in either of these campgrounds to bird and picnic. There’s a short trail going down the creek from the Cherry Creek CG and a short trail going up a side canyon at the McMillan CG.

6. Pine Flats <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L952206>

Location: North on NM 15, mile marker 18.

Travel time one way: 45 minutes.

Facilities: None.

Habitat: Mixed conifer and oak forest with grass understory.

Description: This is a short dirt road that goes into a tall Ponderosa stand. A good place to find forest species on your way to the Gila Cliff Dwellings or Lake Roberts. Open flat areas and gentle slopes make walking easy.

7. Lake Roberts <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L281275>

Location: North on NM 15 then right on NM 35 to Lake Roberts, milepost 25. An alternate route is to take US 180 east from Silver City, left on NM 152, then left on NM 35.

Travel time one way: 1 hour 15 minutes.

Facilities: Vault toilets, picnic tables.

Habitat: Aquatic, ponderosa pine, pinyon/juniper/oak forest.

Description: This is the area’s most beautiful mountain lake and offers excellent birding in marshes and on the ponderosa pine and oak hillsides. You can bird for aquatic species from the boat ramp parking area on the north side of the lake or from Upper End Campground at the east end of the lake.

8. Grapevine & Forks Campgrounds

Location: North on NM 15, milepost 39. There are signs on NM 15 for each of the Gila National Forest Campgrounds.

Travel time one way: 1 hour 30 minutes.

Facilities: Vault toilets.

Habitat: Riparian woods, mixed conifer forest.

Description: Parking at either of these campgrounds gives you access to birding along the Gila River.

9. The Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L589670>

Location: North on NM 15, milepost 46.

Travel time one way: 1 hour 45 minutes.

Facilities: Toilets at the Visitor Center, Cliff Dwellings Entry Station, and picnic areas.

Habitat: Riparian woods, ponderosa pine, pinyon/juniper/oak forest.

Description: The trails from the Monument entrance and Visitor Center provide good access for birding along the Gila River. The half mile trail to the Cliff Dwellings is very nice and good birding. There is an entry fee for the Gila Cliff Dwelling National Monument. Look for Golden Columbine here in the summer. The Visitor Center has a great selection of Native American, southwest and nature books.

Birding East of Silver City

10. Black Range

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L7406970>

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1141403>

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L281118>

Location: East on US 180 then left on NM 152. There are signs for three Gila National Forest Campgrounds; Upper Gallinas Campground, Railroad Campground, and Iron Creek Campground. All are good birding locations.

Travel time one way: 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Facilities: Vault toilets, picnic tables.

Habitat: Riparian woods, ponderosa pine, pinyon/juniper/oak forest.

Description: The Black Range offers a beautiful variety of mountain scenery from desert foothills to mixed conifer and aspen forests. There are convenient places to park and bird at Upper Gallinas, Railroad, and Iron Creek Campgrounds.

Birding West of Silver City

11. Mangas Springs <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L934338>

Location: West on US 180 about 17.5 miles to milepost 96. Slow down when you see the milepost and look to the left for McMillen Road. Turn left onto McMillen and you will see an intersecting road on your left which is the continuation of McMillen. Park in the small pull-off at the intersection.

Travel time one way: 20 minutes.

Facilities: None.

Habitat: Marsh and riparian woods.

Description: This small marsh along the highway is an oasis in the surrounding arid hills. It attracts many birds and is a great place to stop on your way to the Gila River Bird Habitat Management Unit.

McMillen Road is a short dirt road. As you walk along it you can bird the fields and marshy areas on both sides. In 1/4 mile, you'll come to Mangas Creek. Go left and continue walking down the ranch road to bird the cottonwoods and brush along the creek. The road dead ends in about a 1/4 mile. Return to your car and continue walking or driving west on Mangas Creek Lane, a single lane, paved road that parallels US 180. It is wooded and marshy on each side and returns to US 180. (Note: Google maps does not show McMillen Road intersecting US 180, but there is a McMillen Road sign there.)

12. Bill Evans Lake <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L281279>

Location: West on US 180 then left at the Bill Evans Lake turnoff, milepost 87.

Travel time one way: 45 minutes.

Facilities: Vault toilets on both sides of the lake.

Habitat: Aquatic.

Description: This small fishing reservoir can be visited in conjunction with the Gila River Bird Habitat Management Unit. Winter is the best time for waterfowl.

13. Gila River Bird Habitat Management Unit, Gila National Forest

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L5547012>

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1062940>

Location: West on US 180 then left at the Bill Evans Lake turnoff, milepost 87. In about three and a half miles, and before ascending the hill to the lake, proceed straight on a gravel road that goes south. The road will cross through private property but the road is public. Continue on the gravel road for about five miles to River Vista.

Travel time one way: 1 hour.

Facilities: Vault toilet at River Vista.

Habitat: Gila River, riparian woods.

Description: This stretch of the Gila River is managed by the Gila National Forest as bird habitat and a great variety of species can be seen. There is a large parking area and a vault toilet at River Vista. There are paths from the parking area down a slope and into the woods along the river. The cottonwoods can be birded from the parking area. Walking into the riparian forest is more adventurous because you must negotiate your way through cottonwoods and brush without benefit of trails. You can also drive another mile and a half to Billings Vista at the end of the road. There is space to park and a trail that goes about a quarter mile to the river. You can bird the sandy washes which the trail crosses. Birding from the road and parking areas at both vistas is rewarding.

14. Iron Bridge, Gila River

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L953575>

Location: West on US 180. After you pass Riverside and milepost 86, you cross the Gila River. Slow down as you cross the river and make a sharp left turn onto Iron Bridge Road. Go 3/4 mile to where the road bends to the right and park in the large dirt pull-off along the fence line on the left. Walk down the old road from the parking area toward the river to get to the Iron Bridge.

Travel time one way: 45 minutes.

Facilities: None.

Habitat: Gila River, riparian woods.

Description: There's great birding along the 1/4 mile walk from the parking area to the bridge. From the center of the bridge waterfowl and riparian species can be observed on the river and in the willows and cottonwoods along the banks. After you cross the bridge, you can walk a dirt road through the riparian area near the river for more birding opportunities. The old Iron Bridge is property of the Nature Conservancy. There is fencing around the property and pedestrian openings that block the bridge from all but foot traffic.

15. Gila River Farm <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L334455>

Location: West on US 180. At Cliff turn north (right) onto NM 211. Where NM 211 curves right, go straight on NM 293 (also called Box Canyon Road). Just after mile marker 4, turn right into the driveway at the "Gila River Farm" sign. (The sign is sometimes obscured by vegetation.) Follow the driveway into the parking lot.

Travel time one way: 50 minutes.

Facilities: Vault toilet, picnic table.

Habitat: Grasses, pond, marsh, and riparian willow/cottonwood.

Description: Gila River Farm is owned by the Nature Conservancy but open to the public. A trail starts to the right of the Gila River Farm building. There is a pond with a bird blind, and a restored marsh along the trail.

16. Mogollon Creek & the Gila River

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1412850>

Location: West on US 180. At Cliff turn north (right) onto NM 211. When NM 211 curves right, go straight on NM 293 (also called Box Canyon Road). It's about seven miles from Hwy 180 to the end of the road where there is a primitive Gila National Forest Campground.

Travel time one way: 1 hour.

Facilities: Vault toilets.

Habitat: Riparian woods, cottonwoods, and desert scrub.

Description: There is dense vegetation along the banks of Mogollon Creek and the Gila River. You'll be birding mostly in the cottonwoods and sycamores.

17. Catwalk of Whitewater Canyon

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L354093>

Location: West on US 180 to Glenwood, milepost 50, then turn right on NM 174. There is an entry fee for the Catwalk National Recreation Area.

Travel time one way: 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Facilities: Vault toilets, picnic tables.

Habitat: Riparian woods (mostly Sycamores), pinyon/juniper forest.

Description: The Catwalk National Recreation Trail is made of metal walkways through a scenic canyon narrow. There are many historical information signs and a beautiful picnic area in the Sycamores. This is a unique birding excursion. American Dippers have been seen here. Call the Glenwood Ranger Station in Glenwood at 575-539-2481 to get information about the Catwalk. The Catwalk is sometimes inaccessible due to flooding during rainy seasons.