

Birds of the Sandia and Manzanita Mountains

Sandia Ranger District
Cibola National Forest



United States
Department of
Agriculture

PREPARED BY
Forest
Service

Southwestern
Region

Introduction

This totally revised checklist now comprises 244 species, nearly a third of all the species occurring in North America. It is applicable to the entire 100,000 acres of the Sandia District and includes the Sandia Mountain massif north of Interstate 40, as well as a portion of the Manzanita Mountains lying south of the freeway. Towering a mile above the surrounding plain, Sandia Crest (10,678 feet) is at the apex of four successive life zones, a fact that helps explain the great diversity and abundance of the avifauna on this desert island.

The following recommendations are given as starting points for exploring the several habitat types on the Sandia Ranger District. A district map and perhaps a copy of the "New Mexico Bird Finding Guide" will help to pinpoint these and many other sites rewarding to the birdwatcher.

- **Desert Scrub:** Embudito Canyon and Three-Gun Canyon
- **Piñon/Juniper:** Otero Canyon and Piedra Lisa Trail
- **Ponderosa Pine:** Cienega Canyon and Canoncito Spring area.
- **Mixed Conifer:** Capulin Spring and Tree Spring Trail.
- **Spruce/Fir:** 10-K Trail North and various Crest trails.

Visitors with mobility or visual impairments will find wheelchair access to the Cienega Nature Trail (which also has braille interpretive plaques), the Doc Long picnic complex, and the trail to Madera Canyon Overlook that starts at Balsam Glade.



This list is the result of extensive field work done during the past 25 years by Hart R. Schwarz, Neotropical bird specialist for the Cibola National Forest. Except for a few dozen of the rarest species, Hart has seen and verified most of the birds on the list, making it about 50 birds richer than the previous checklist. Breeding and seasonal status of the birds has also been updated based on his many hours in the field.

Cover drawing of Townsend's Solitaire by Mimi Hoppe Wolf.

Using the Checklist

The columns following the name of each species are intended to help with identification.

The **first three** columns indicate the status of the species by season:

Summer: Birds present during this season only are primarily the neotropical birds, which spend the summer here but return to Mexico, Central America and South America during our winter. An asterisk (*) in this column indicates that breeding is either confirmed or highly probable.

Winter: These birds, such as the Oregon Junco, are present only in the winter and will return to more northerly breeding areas in the spring.

Transients: This column denotes spring and fall migrants, i.e., birds enroute to another destination. It also includes wanderers and vagrants in summer or winter. Note: Species present in both summer and winter are permanent residents.

Within each of the three columns you will find an alpha code that designates the relative abundance for each species as follows:

- C = Common:** Easy to find in suitable habitat at the right time of year.
- F = Fairly common:** Moderately easy to find, but less predictable than "Common."
- U = Uncommon:** May find such species with a little luck or extra effort.
- R = Rare:** Hard to find because distribution is very sparse or local.
- O = Occasional:** Not present every year and may be absent for several years.
- X = Accidental:** A windfall, encountered at intervals exceeding 10 years.

The remaining columns describe the habitat(s) where one is most likely to encounter each species. Habitat designations are very approximate but do reflect an elevational gradient that moves from the lower foothills (desert scrub or rocky slopes) around 5,600 feet to Sandia Crest (Spruce/Fir dominated by Corkbark Fir and Engleman Spruce) at 10,678 feet. The last two columns—Cliffs/Open Sky and Open Water/Riparian—are not tied to elevation. For breeding birds (*) the key refers to habitat occupied during the nesting season only.

	Summer	Winter	Transient	Residential/Developed	Desert Scrub/Rocky Slopes	Juniper Savannah	Pinon/Juniper Woodland	Ponderosa/Oak Forest	Mixed Conifer	Spruce/Fir	Cliffs/Open Sky	Open Water/Riparian
_ Zone-tailed Hawk			O								•	
_ Red-tailed Hawk	*F	F	F	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
_ Ferruginous Hawk			R								•	
_ Rough-legged Hawk			O								•	
_ Golden Eagle	*U	U	F								•	
Falcons												
_ American Kestrel	*F	F	F		•	•	•					
_ Merlin		R	R	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
_ Peregrine Falcon	*R	O	R								•	
_ Prairie Falcon	*U	U	U								•	
Grouse and Turkeys												
_ Wild Turkey	*R	R	R				•	•	•			
New World Quail												
_ Scaled Quail	*F	F	F	•	•	•						
Rails and Coots												
_ Sora			O									•
_ American Coot			O									•
Cranes												
_ Sandhill Crane			R								•	
Plovers												
_ Killdeer			R									•
Sandpipers												
_ Solitary Sandpiper			O									•
_ Spotted Sandpiper			R									•
_ Common Snipe			R									•
Pigeons and Doves												
_ Rock Dove	*F	F	F	•								
_ Band-tailed Pigeon	*F	O	F			•	•	•	•			

	Summer	Winter	Transient	Residential/Developed	Desert Scrub/Rocky Slopes	Juniper Savannah	Pinon/Juniper Woodland	Ponderosa/Oak Forest	Mixed Conifer	Spruce/Fir	Cliffs/Open Sky	Open Water/Riparian
Kingfishers												
_ Belted Kingfisher			R									•
Woodpeckers												
_ Lewis' Woodpecker		O	R	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
_ Red-headed Woodpecker			X	•								•
_ Acorn Woodpecker			O				•	•				
_ Yellow-bellied Sapsucker		O	O			•	•	•				
_ Red-naped Sapsucker	*F	R	F					•	•	•		•
_ Red-breasted Sapsucker			X			•	•	•				
_ Williamson's Sapsucker	*F	U	F						•	•		
_ Ladder-backed Woodpecker	*U	U	U		•	•	•					
_ Downy Woodpecker	*U	U	U				•	•	•	•		•
_ Hairy Woodpecker	*F	F	F				•	•	•	•		
_ Three-toed Woodpecker	*R	R	R								•	
_ Northern Flicker												
_ Red-shafted form	*C	C	C		•	•	•	•	•	•		•
_ Yellow-shafted form			R	•	•	•	•	•				•
Tyrant Flycatchers												
_ Olive-sided Flycatcher	*R		U						•	•		
_ Western Wood-Pewee	*F		F					•	•			•
_ Willow Flycatcher			X									•
_ Hammond's Flycatcher			U		•	•	•	•	•	•		•
_ Dusky Flycatcher	*U		F						•	•		
_ Gray Flycatcher	*U		F				•	•				
_ Cordilleran Flycatcher	*F		U					•	•	•		•
_ Black Phoebe			O									•
_ Eastern Phoebe			X									•
_ Say's Phoebe	*F	R	F	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Ash-throated Flycatcher	*F		U			•	•	•				
_ Cassin's Kingbird	*F		F			•	•	•				
_ Western Kingbird	*U		U	•	•	•						
_ Eastern Kingbird			X	•	•	•						
Shrikes												
_ Northern Shrike		O	O		•	•						
_ Loggerhead Shrike	*R	U	U		•	•						

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Vireos												
_ Gray Vireo	*R		R		• •							
_ Cassin's Vireo			U				• •					
_ Plumbeous Vireo	*F		F				• •					
_ Yellow-throated Vireo			X		• • •							
_ Warbling Vireo	*F		U						• •			•
_ Red-eyed Vireo			O			• • •						
Jays, Crows and Ravens												
_ Steller's Jay	*C	C	C						• • •			
_ Blue Jay		O	O	• • •	• • •							
_ Western Scrub-Jay	*C	C	C	• • •	• • •							
_ Pinyon Jay	*F	F	F		• • •							
_ Clark's Nutcracker	*U	U	U				• • •		• •			
_ Black-billed Magpie			O		• • •							
_ American Crow	*U	F	U				• •					
_ Common Raven	*C	C	C	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •
Larks												
_ Horned Lark	*U	U	U		• •							
Swallows												
_ Tree Swallow			O								• •	
_ Violet-green Swallow	*C		C				• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	
_ Northern Rough-winged Swallow			R								• •	
_ Bank Swallow			O								• •	
_ Barn Swallow	*F		F	•							•	
_ Cliff Swallow	*R		R	•							•	
Chickadees and Titmice												
_ Black-capped Chickadee			X				• • •	• • •	• • •			•
_ Mountain Chickadee	*C	C	C				• • •	• • •	• • •			
_ Juniper Titmouse	*F	F	F			• •						
Bushtits												
_ Bushtit	*F	C	C		• • •	• • •						

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Thrashers and Other Mimics												
_ Gray Catbird			O									•
_ Northern Mockingbird	*F	O	U	•	•	•						
_ Sage Thrasher		R	F			•	•					
_ Brown Thrasher			O	•	•	•	•					
_ Curve-billed Thrasher	*U	U	U	•	•	•						
_ Crissal Thrasher	*F	F	F	•	•	•						
Starlings												
_ European Starling	*C	C	C	•	•	•						
Pipits												
_ American Pipit			O							•	•	
Waxwings												
_ Bohemian Waxwing			X				•					•
_ Cedar Waxwing		O	U				•					•
Silky Flycatchers												
_ Phainopepla			O				•	•				
Wood Warblers												
_ Tennessee Warbler			O	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Orange-crowned Warbler	*U		F							•	•	
_ Nashville Warbler			R	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Virginia's Warbler	*C		C				•	•	•			
_ Northern Parula			X	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Yellow Warbler			R									•
_ Chestnut-sided Warbler			O	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Magnolia Warbler			X	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Black-throated Blue Warbler			O	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Yellow-rumped Warbler												
_ Audubon's form	*C	O	C					•	•	•		
_ Myrtle form			R	•	•	•	•					
_ Black-throated Gray Warbler	*F		F				•					
_ Townsend's Warbler			F	•	•	•	•	•	•			
_ Grace's Warbler	*F		F				•					
_ Palm Warbler			O	•	•	•						

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_ Black and White Warbler			O	•	•	•	•	•				
_ American Redstart			O	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Worm-eating Warbler			O	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Ovenbird			X	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Northern Waterthrush			R									•
_ Louisiana Waterthrush			X									•
_ MacGillivray's Warbler	*F		F						•	•		•
_ Common Yellowthroat			O									•
_ Hooded Warbler			O	•	•	•	•	•				•
_ Wilson's Warbler			F	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
_ Red-faced Warbler	*O		O						•			•
_ Painted Redstart			O									•
_ Yellow-breasted Chat			O									•
Tanagers												
_ Hepatic Tanager	*R		R				•	•				
_ Summer Tanager			X									•
_ Scarlet Tanager			X									•
_ Western Tanager	*F		F					•	•	•		•
Towhees and Sparrows												
_ Green-tailed Towhee	*F	O	F							•	•	
_ Spotted Towhee	*C	F	C			•	•	•	•	•		
_ Canyon Towhee	*C	C	C	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Cassin's Sparrow		O	O		•	•						
_ Rufous-crowned Sparrow	*U	U	U		•							
_ Chipping Sparrow	*F	O	C				•	•	•			
_ Clay-colored Sparrow			R		•	•	•					
_ Brewer's Sparrow			O	F	•	•	•					
_ Black-chinned Sparrow	*F	X	F		•							
_ Vesper Sparrow	*R		F		•	•						
_ Lark Sparrow	*U		U		•	•						
_ Black-throated Sparrow	*F	R	U		•	•						
_ Sage Sparrow			R		•	•						
_ Lark Bunting			O		•	•						
_ Savannah Sparrow			X		•	•						
_ Fox Sparrow		O	O		•	•	•					
_ Song Sparrow			O	R		•	•					•
_ Lincoln's Sparrow			R		•	•						•
_ White-throated Sparrow		O	R	•	•	•	•					

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_ Harris's Sparrow		O	O	•	•	•	•					
_ White-crowned Sparrow		F	F	•	•	•	•					
_ Golden-crowned Sparrow		R	R	•	•	•	•					
_ Dark-eyed Junco												
_ Gray-headed form	*C	C	C				•	•	•	•		
_ Oregon forms		C	C	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
_ Slate-colored form		U	U	•	•	•	•	•				
_ White-winged form		O	O	•	•	•	•	•				
_ Chestnut-collared Longspur		X		•	•							
Grosbeaks and Buntings												
_ Pyrrhuloxia		O	•	•	•							
_ Rose-breasted Grosbeak		R	•	•	•	•	•					
_ Black-headed Grosbeak	*C	C	C			•	•	•	•			•
_ Blue Grosbeak	*R	U	U				•					•
_ Lazuli Bunting	*O	O	R									•
_ Indigo Bunting	*O	O	R									•
_ Dickcissel		X		•	•	•						
Blackbirds and Orioles												
_ Red-winged Blackbird			R									•
_ Eastern Meadowlark	*U	U	R			•						
_ Western Meadowlark	*F	U	F		•	•						
_ Brewer's Blackbird	*R	R	U									•
_ Common Grackle			O									•
_ Great-tailed Grackle			O									•
_ Brown-headed Cowbird	*F	F	U	•	•	•	•	•	•			
_ Bullock's Oriole	*U	U	U	•								•
_ Baltimore Oriole			X	•								•
_ Scott's Oriole	*U	U	U		•	•						
Finches												
_ Gray-crowned Rosy Finch		R	R								•	•
_ Hepburn's form		R	R								•	•
_ Black Rosy Finch		R	R								•	•
_ Brown-capped Rosy Finch		O	O								•	•
_ Pine Grosbeak		R	R					•	•	•		
_ Cassin's Finch	*R	F	F							•	•	
_ House Finch	*C	C	C	•	•	•						
_ Red Crossbill	*F	F	F				•	•	•	•		

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_ White-winged Crossbill		X	X							•		
_ Pine Siskin	*C	C	C					•	•	•		
_ Lesser Goldfinch	*F		F				•	•				•
_ American Goldfinch		R	F				•	•				•
_ Evening Grosbeak	*R	U	F					•	•			
Old World Sparrows												
_ House Sparrow	*C	C	C	•								

A Little About the Manzanita Mountains

The Manzanitas are a bridge—about 20 miles long—which connects the Sandia Mountains north of I-40 with the Manzano Mountains to the south. While the “bridge” tops out at a mere 8,000 feet, the mountain blocks at either end of the bridge rise up well beyond 10,000 feet. When viewed in full panorama, as from Albuquerque’s West Mesa, these three units form an impressive, interconnected mountain island stretching for 60 miles from north to south in a vast desert sea. The southern half of the Manzanitas belong to the Isleta Indian Reservation, but the northern half is part of the Sandia Ranger District, Cibola National Forest. Adding complexity to the situation is the fact that some 30-odd square miles to the east of Kirtland Air Force Base and west of South 14 (now 337) are lands withdrawn from public use, initially to test weapons there in the 1940’s and now for research purposes by the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy. Thus, much of the Manzanitas is not readily accessible to the general public, except places just outside the “withdrawal,” such as Otero and David Canyons.

Virtually all of the Manzanitas are crowned by mature pinyon/juniper woodlands, broken here and there by dry mountain meadows and a mosaic of ponderosa at the higher elevations and in the drainages. On the western slopes of the Manzanitas, the woodland gives way to extensive tracts of juniper savannah, and then, finally, to

just grassland and/or shrubland. As one would expect, the birds in this sector of the Sandia District are similar to those in corresponding habitats in the Sandias. However, there are some surprising contrasts in the abundance of certain birds, as evidenced by the following examples.

Wild Turkey: Although never common, Ben Franklin's bird is seen or heard occasionally in the Manzanitas, whereas in the Sandias it has virtually disappeared. Turkeys have recently been introduced in the Manzanos and are spreading northward into the still somewhat isolated Manzanitas.

Gray Flycatcher: Known in the Sandias as a breeder since 1992 from only one location, it is surprisingly common in the Manzanitas in pinyon/juniper woodlands, usually between 7,000 and 7,500 feet.

Gray Vireo: This juniper savannah bird, which is listed as "endangered" by the State of New Mexico, occurs sparingly at the northern end of the Sandias. However, a major breeding area for the Gray Vireo is found on the Military Withdrawal in the Manzanita foothills, up to about 6,500 feet.

Black-throated Gray Warbler: Decked out in black and white like a chickadee, this beautiful neotropical species is often the most abundant bird in the mature woodlands of the Manzanitas, especially on ridgetops between 7,000 and 7,500 feet. By contrast, its occurrence in the Sandias is much less concentrated.

Vesper Sparrow: A fine songster, this little sparrow has a preference for the dry mountain meadows (usually above 7,000 feet) that are sprinkled throughout the Manzanitas and the Manzanos. So far, it has not been detected nesting in the Sandias, but it is a migrant there, especially in the fall.



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