

Southeast Arizona Code of Birding Ethics

Last Edited - February 2024

Adapted from American Birding Association (www.aba.org/ethics) with region-specific information for southeastern Arizona.

This code is written to provide guidelines for safe and ethical bird watching activities in Southeast Arizona. It was collaboratively developed by conservation organizations, land managers, and agricultural producers in the region. It is important that birders respect the wildlife and lands on which they bird and the people who steward those lands. If birders do not act in accordance with this Code of Ethics, you and other birders may lose access to birding areas; please practice and promote respectful, enjoyable, and thoughtful birding as defined in this code.

1. Respect and promote birds and their environment.

(a) **Support the conservation of birds and their habitats.** Engage in and promote bird-friendly practices whenever possible, such as keeping cats and other domestic animals indoors or controlled, acting to prevent window strikes, maintaining safe feeding stations, landscaping with native plants, drinking shade-grown coffee, and advocating for policies that promote bird habitat. Specifically to southeastern Arizona, Be mindful of any negative environmental impacts of your activities, including contributing to climate change. Water conservation is a very important local issue. Reduce or offset such impacts as much as you are able. If you see open standing pipes or “death pipes” please [report them here](#) as they are frequently lethal to birds.

(b) **Avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger.** Be particularly cautious around active nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display sites, and feeding sites. Nesting birds, especially raptors such as hawks and owls, are very sensitive to disturbance. In desert habitats, nesting is primarily March-April and at higher elevations can be May-August.

Always exercise caution and restraint when photographing, recording, or otherwise approaching birds. More detailed information and best practices is on the Audubon Society website: <https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/audubons-guide-ethical-bird-photography#>

Limit the use of recordings and other audio methods of attracting birds in heavily birded areas, for species that are rare in the area, and never with species that are Threatened or Endangered. Be especially aware of this concern during the most popular birding months in Southeast Arizona: April-May and July-August.

- **Report observed actions that negatively impact birds** to AZGFD Operation Game Thief hotline: 1-800-352-0700

(c) **Always minimize habitat disturbance.** Consider the benefits of staying on trails, preserving snags, and similar practices. Stay on marked roads and trails and always leave gates as you find them! Be mindful of signs on the property and Arizona's trespassing laws.

(d) **Recognize, understand, and respect the desert environment.** Be prepared for safety hazards such as sudden rainfall in the summer and winter, dry air that can lead to dehydration (even in winter), local wildlife that may impose dangers to birders, and other factors unique to the desert. Refer to the Arizona Birding Trail for more safety information:

<https://arizonabirdingtrail.com/birding-basics/know-before-you-go/>

2. Respect and promote the birding community and its individual members.

(a) **Be an exemplary ethical role model** by following this Code and leading by example. Always bird and report with honesty and integrity.

(b) **Respect the interests, rights, and skill levels of fellow birders, as well as people participating in other outdoor activities.** Freely share your knowledge and experience and be especially helpful to beginning birders. When in rural and ranching areas, enjoy the heritage and history of Arizona and share the fun and beauty of birds with those you encounter if comfortable doing so.

(c) **Share bird observations freely**, provided such reporting would not violate other sections of this Code, as birders, ornithologists, and conservationists derive considerable benefit from publicly available bird sightings. Ask the land owner/manager of the properties you visit if they would be interested in hearing about the results of your survey. If so inclined, please share observations in eBird, especially in less birded areas to help add knowledge for monitoring of rural areas.

(d) **Approach instances of perceived unethical birding behavior with sensitivity and respect**; try to resolve the matter in a positive manner, keeping in mind that perspectives vary. Use the situation as an opportunity to teach by example and to introduce more people to this Code.

(e) **In group birding situations, promote knowledge by everyone** in the group of the practices in this Code and ensure that the group does not unduly interfere with others using the same area.

3. Respect and promote the law and the rights of others.

(a) **Never enter private property without the landowner's permission.** No one likes to be caught off guard by being the last to know who is on their property, particularly if it pertains to their own backyard. Keep in mind that private property and leased lands are not often marked as such! Different types of land have different rules and regulations. You may be able to find land

ownership information on phone apps such as Avenza, Gaia, or OnX. Otherwise, here is some general information on land access:

- Private property - No access is allowed unless you have permission from the land owner.
- Arizona State Trust land - No access is allowed unless you have a permit. Get a permit here: <https://azland.my.salesforce-sites.com/recreationalpermit/>
- County land - Access varies according to county; see this Pima County map for information on land ownership:
<https://pimamaps.pima.gov/HtmlPubViewer/index.html?configBase=https://pimamaps.pima.gov/Geocortex/Essentials/PublicPM/REST/sites/mainsite/viewers/mainmap/virtualdirectory/Resources/Config/Default>
- Federal land - There are multiple designations within each federal land unit. Visit the website of the National Wildlife Refuge, National Forest, National Park, or Bureau of Land Management area, you're planning to visit for more information.

Here are some resources on recommended places to go birding:

- State-wide: Arizona Birding Trail - www.arizonabirdingtrail.com
- Southeast Arizona: <https://tucsonaudubon.org/birds-seaz/>
- Altar Valley: [Interactive Birding Map](#)

(b) Familiarize yourself with and follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing activities at your birding location. In particular, be aware of regulations related to birds, such as disturbance of protected nesting areas or sensitive habitats, and the use of audio or food lures.

- Birding should be fun and help build a better future for birds, for birders, and for all people.
- Birds and birding opportunities are shared resources that should be open and accessible to all.
- Birders should always give back more than they take.
- Be aware of the special needs of nesting birds. Don't get too close to active nests and back off immediately if birds show signs of agitation.
- Be respectful of ranchers and the infrastructure they need. Do not disturb cattle, and do not camp within a quarter mile of surface water. Leave gates open or closed as you found them.

(c) Respect the interests of and interact positively with people living, working, and recreating in the area where you are birding. Some birding areas are on working landscapes such as cattle ranches and guest operations. Understand that where you go may only be a portion of a larger operation. Take time to understand the science behind the current land management rather than make judgments on the conditions, and be respectful of the ranchers, their fences, and range improvements.