

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Havasu

National Wildlife Refuge



*The 37,515-acre
Havasu National
Wildlife Refuge is
one of more than
500 refuges throughout
the United States
managed by the Fish
and Wildlife Service.
The National Wildlife
Refuge System is the
only national system
of lands dedicated
to conserving our
wildlife heritage for
people today and for
generations yet
to come.*

**Welcome:
Colorado River
Lifeline**

From desert bighorn sheep to the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, birds and other animals at Havasu National Wildlife Refuge rely on the life-giving waters of the lower Colorado River. The refuge protects 30 river miles—300 miles of shoreline—from Needles, California, to Lake Havasu City, Arizona. One of the last remaining natural stretches of the lower Colorado River flows through the 20-mile-long Topock Gorge.



Vermilion Flycatcher.

Photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth

A great river in a dry, hot land attracts wildlife and people like a powerful magnet. Today, many thousands of visitors annually flock to the refuge to boat through the spectacular Topock Gorge, watch waterbirds in Topock Marsh, or hike to the Needles and Havasu Wilderness Areas.

Wildlife dwell in a precarious balance with the people who recreate here. Remember, we are guests in the home of lower Colorado River animals and plants.



Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

FWS Photograph

**Wildlife:
Birdwatching Hot
Spot**

It is no wonder that rare birds find a haven here within the protected marshes and miles of Colorado River shoreline. Havasu NWR forms a critical haven for wildlife in an increasingly populated part of the country.

Birdwatchers come to the refuge for some of the best birding on the entire lower Colorado. Four endangered bird species find a toehold here: the Yuma clapper rail, southwestern willow flycatcher, peregrine falcon, and southern bald eagle.

Bald Eagle

Photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth





Yuma Clapper Rail

Photograph by Jim Krakowski

*Southwestern
Willow
Flycatcher*

Look for the southwestern willow flycatcher in spring and summer darting out from a willow perch to catch a flying insect. Flycatchers join hundreds of species on the refuge, many of which are neotropical migrants, birds that nest in the United States or Canada and spend the winter south of the border in Mexico or Central or South America. Examples of these birds include hummingbirds, tanagers, and warblers.

*Yuma
Clapper Rail*

Only lucky, patient birdwatchers will spot the elusive Yuma clapper rail, a year-round, chicken-sized resident of Topock Marsh. A rail might be considered the Houdini of the bird world. A master of the vanishing act, the rail fades into the cattails, camouflages its dome nest, dives underwater if need be, freezes like a statue, and rarely calls out. A clapper rail reserves its loud *kek-kek-kek-kek* for the early mornings and late evenings of the breeding season.

Peregrine Falcon

Photograph by
Tom Smylie



Peregrine Falcon

Though sightings of peregrine falcons are rare, they do nest on the refuge. A peregrine can plummet at 150 mph upon an unsuspecting bird flapping along far below the speedy predator. Once slipping fast toward extinction because of egg-shell thinning caused by the pesticide DDT, the peregrine is returning to race across the skies. The banning of DDT and intensive reintroduction programs are succeeding.

Bald Eagle

Our American symbol tends to stick close to the waters, where fish and waterfowl are plentiful. Your best chance for bald eagle watching is in winter. An eagle will swoop down with talons outstretched to pluck a fish from the water. Bald eagles do not nest on this refuge, so sightings are mostly limited to fall and winter.



Bald Eagle

Photograph by
John and Karen
Hollingsworth

Wildlife Watching Tips

Dawn and dusk are the best times to see wildlife.

In warmer climates, little is moving on hot summer afternoons or on windy days.

Observe from the sidelines. Leave “abandoned” young animals alone. A parent is probably close by waiting for you to leave. Do not offer snacks your lunch could disrupt wild digestive systems.

Cars make good observation blinds. Drive slowly, stopping to scan places wildlife might hide. Use binoculars or a long lens for a closer look.

Try sitting quietly in one good location. Let wildlife get used to your presence. Many animals that were hidden will reappear once they think you are gone. Walk quietly in designated areas, being aware of sounds and smells. Often you will hear more than you will see.

Teach children quiet observation. Other wildlife watchers will appreciate your consideration.

Look for animal signs. Tracks, scat, feathers, and nests left behind often tell interesting stories.





Clark's Grebes

Photograph by Jim Krakowski

Gaggles of Geese and Courting Grebes

Besides the rare birds, the refuge shelters thousands of Canada and snow geese and ducks each winter. Snow geese descend like a winter squall of whirling flakes in late October after a long flight from Arctic nesting grounds. By February they are gone. Assuring excellent habitat for wintering migratory birds is the primary goal of the refuge.

Western and Clark's grebes raise their young in both Topock Marsh and Topock Gorge. Herons and egrets nest in rookeries in the marsh. Along the river, songbirds warble from the shelter of Fremont cottonwoods, Gooding's willow, and honey and screwbean mesquite.

In the desert uplands, your best chance to see roadrunners and coveys of Gambel's quail is during warm weather in early morning or evenings.

Desert Bighorns Preside and Jackrabbits Prevail

Colorful sandstone cliffs towering above Topock Gorge form more than a spectacular backdrop for boaters. Desert bighorn sheep find a haven in this vertical world connected to the thirst-quenching Colorado river.

It is easy to focus on the glamour animals like bighorns or the elusive mountain lion and overlook the foundation of the Havasu NWR ecosystems. Jackrabbits, mice, and packrats form a plentiful prey base for coyotes, foxes, and bobcats.

Restoring Wildlife Homes

Behind the scenes at the refuge, managers are working hard to assure that the native plants and animals have livable homes. Here are just a few examples of the work at hand.

Tackling an Exotic Invader

Salt cedar, a tree originally from Asia, aggressively takes over disturbed areas along the Colorado River. Native cottonwood and willow trees cannot compete. The staff at Havasu NWR works to control salt cedar and reestablish our native forests, which are much more valuable for wildlife.

Water for Topock Marsh

The 4,000-acre Topock Marsh depends on water from the Colorado River, as do metropolitan areas as far as 300 miles away. Managing water flows to assure the best levels for waterfowl and shorebirds takes constant monitoring and coordination.

Farming for Birds

At the northern end of Topock Marsh, you will find refuge croplands growing in the Pintail Slough Management Unit. Waterfowl feast on the wheat, millet, and natural plants during the winter months.

History: Petroglyphs to Parker Dam

Indian petroglyphs in Topock Gorge trace the stories of early peoples who lived along the lower Colorado River. A few old mines tell a more recent tale of nineteenth century gold prospectors hoping to strike it rich.

When the gates closed at Parker Dam in 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created Havasu NWR to provide migratory waterfowl habitat. The refuge has shifted

boundaries since then, including the addition of the Needles Peaks area in 1968.

Topock Marsh, Topock Gorge, and Needles and Havasu Wilderness form three distinct areas, each with its own attractions and regulations designed to protect the rare beauty of Havasu NWR.

Things to do at the Refuge



Stop by the refuge office in Needles, California, between 8 am and 4 pm, Monday through Friday, to pick up leaflets or talk to staff.

Topock Marsh

Each year, thousands of visitors launch their boats to explore Topock Marsh. You will find excellent canoeing, fishing, and waterbird watching.

Topock Gorge

The breathtaking Topock Gorge attracts many wildlife viewers in boats to this favorite lower Colorado River destination. The eastern bank of the river forms the boundary for the Needles Wilderness, and the western bank forms the boundary for the Havasu Wilderness. Boats may enter at either end of Topock Gorge and operators must be alert throughout the canyon to close, two-way traffic. Water skiing, camping, and open fires are not permitted in the narrow gorge. Several local

Topock Gorge. FWS photograph



guidebooks offer an in-depth look at the natural features of the canyon. Detailed maps are available at some of the boat rental facilities. Note that the growing popularity of the refuge for water recreation causes congestion and other problems that accompany high use. Please follow regulations and respect other refuge visitors.

These two wilderness areas offer their quiet desert beauty for the prepared hiker. The first rule is to bring plenty of water. Every plant and animal has adapted to desert living. Cactus store water during rainy periods. Palo verde trees drop

*Curved-billed
Thrasher in
Cholla.*

Photograph by
Denwood Butler



their water-wasting leaves when rain is scarce. Lizards and snakes find all the water they need from the food they eat.

Needles and Havasu Wilderness

The passage of the Arizona Desert Wilderness Act in 1990 and the California Desert Protection Act in 1994, together designated 17,606 acres, or 32 percent of the refuge, as wilderness.

Help Us Protect the Refuge

Closed Areas

To protect floating nest birds, jet powered personal watercraft (PWC) such as Sea Doos, Wave Runners, etc. are not allowed in backwaters off the main Colorado River channel for the 15-mile stretch from the Island/Castle Rock location, north to the Interstate 40 bridge, buoy line. Please watch for buoys and signs. A small portion of Topock Marsh is closed to all entry annually from October 1 through January 31 to decrease disturbance to wildlife. Several Topock Gorge backwaters, identified with buoys, are closed to protect wildlife.

Boating



Boating on refuge waters is extremely popular. Please stay out of restricted areas, which are marked by signs and buoys. Make sure your boat conforms with the appropriate federal, state, and local laws.



Overnight mooring of watercraft is allowed only at the Five Mile Landing concession on Topock Marsh, where boat slips are available for a nominal fee. There are also free boat launches at North Dike, Five Mile Landing, and Catfish Paradise.



Boats cannot create wakes in the harbor of Five Mile Landing concession on Topock Marsh and the entrance and harbor at Golden Shores Marina. The backwaters off the main channel in most of Topock Gorge are No Wake zones.

For Your Safety

As more boaters share the river, it is crucial that all watercraft operators follow safety regulations. Please check with the refuge office for copies of state and federal safety rules.

Water Skiing



Water skiing or similar recreational towing is permitted between sunrise and sunset only on designated portions of the Colorado River. You cannot water ski in Topock Gorge from the south buoy line to the north buoy line at Interstate 40. All state and federal regulations apply.

Barrel Cactus

FWS photograph



Glass Containers



To protect wildlife as well as fellow refuge visitors, glass containers are not allowed on beaches.

Weapons



Carrying, possessing, or discharging weapons or fireworks are not allowed on the refuge unless specifically authorized.

Collecting

All plants, animals, and minerals are protected. Disturbance or collection is prohibited (except by Special permit.)

Camping



Recreational vehicle and tent camping is available at the Five Mile Landing concession at Topock Marsh. Camping in wilderness areas is by permit only and is restricted to areas over 1 mile from the river. All other areas of the refuge are closed to camping.

Hunting



Public hunting on Havasu NWR is permitted in specified areas. Hunters must follow all applicable state and federal regulations, along with special regulations found in the refuge hunting leaflet.

Fishing



Sport fishing is permitted in all waters open to the public except those areas designated by sign or barrier as being closed. State and federal fishing laws and regulations apply.

Frogging

Bullfrogs may be taken during the season by gig, spear, bow and arrow, or hook and line, and with the aid of an artificial light.

Motorized Vehicles



Remember, the refuge plant life is fragile. All motorized vehicles, including motorcycles, must stay on developed roads and parking areas. Operators must have a valid state license and drive safely. Only registered and licensed vehicles are allowed on the refuge. *No motorized travel is permitted in the designated wilderness areas.*

Fires



Fires are allowed only in the designated camping area of the Five Mile Landing concession.

Pets



All pets must be leashed, and owners are responsible for cleaning up after their animals. Better yet, leave pets at home.

Accidents

Accidents involving damage to property, injury to the public, or to wildlife must be reported to refuge headquarters.

Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations lists complete regulations.

Volunteering at the Refuge

Volunteers at Havasu NWR help out with projects vital to the refuge mission. Some accommodations are available; please contact the refuge if you would like to lend a hand to help wildlife.

Cactus Wrens

Photograph by Tom Smylie



Havasu NWR Facts

Where is it?

From Interstate 40, watch for a Havasu NWR exit sign close to the California/Arizona border. Follow the signs to the refuge.

To reach Topock Marsh from Needles, California, cross the Needles bridge into Arizona following Harbor Drive north, then turn right onto Mohave County 223 and watch for the refuge sign.

The refuge office is in Needles, California. From Interstate 40, exit on J Street and go southwest (uphill) 0.06 miles. Turn right at Headquarters entrance sign and follow the signs; the office is in the back.

*When was it
established?*

1941

How big is it?

37,515 acres.

Why is it here?

To protect wildlife and habitats along the lower Colorado River.

Summer Tanager

Photograph by Tom Smylie



Havasu National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 3009
Needles, California 92363
760/326-3853
760/326-5745 Fax

1 800/344-WILD

<http://southwest.fws.gov>

Cover photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth

January 1999

