

Field Trip Information: OLLI Birding for Beginners, Spring 2024

Prepared by Laura Couchman laura.d.couchman@gmail.com

This handout includes details for our class's seven field trips during February and March 2024, listed in order by date. I will be speaking about these places during Week 2's class on January 30/31. Choose a first and second choice and RSVP to me by email, answering the questions in my email.

Available Field Trips

Field trip locations and dates	
<i>Monday, February 12</i> <i>8:00 to 10:00 am</i>	Christopher Columbus Park Tucson
<i>Monday, February 19</i> <i>8:00 to 10:00 am</i>	Sweetwater Wetlands Park Tucson
<i>Friday, February 23</i> <i>8:30 to 10:00 am (sitting)</i>	El Rio Open Space Preserve Marana
<i>Monday, February 26</i> <i>8:00 to 10:00 am</i>	Agua Caliente Park Tucson
<i>Friday, March 1</i> <i>8:00 to 10:00 am</i>	Historic Canoa Ranch Green Valley
<i>Friday, March 8</i> <i>8:00 to 10:00 am</i>	Sweetwater Wetlands Park Tucson
<i>Monday, March 11</i> <i>9:00 to 10:30 am (sitting)</i>	Santa Rita Lodge Madera Canyon

Review the descriptions for each location for more about address, where to park, where to meet etc. Use links in each description if you want to learn even more: the location's website and the eBird Hotspot link (another great Cornell Lab of Ornithology tech tool). The Hotspot link shows a list of the birds most recently spotted there. On that page you'll also find links to a map of the area.

Parking is free for all trips except Madera Canyon (which requires an \$8 day fee or your National Park Pass). All locations have restrooms or porta potties near the trip starting point. For all trips, check the weather and dress in layers - temperatures can change a lot between 8 and 10 am. If rain is falling, we will need to reschedule; if the weather is bad enough to cancel I'll send you an email 2 hours before the trip start time so you'll know for sure whether it's on or off. Bring your binoculars and your charged-up phone, and wear sturdy shoes for walking. If you need to reach me on Field Trip Day, like if you're lost or something, phone or send me a text message at **773-706-8623**.

Regardless of which trip you attend, save this handout for future reference so you can go birding on your own at any of these spots all of which are open to the public.

Christopher Columbus Park

Monday, February 12 8:00 am to 10:00 am

4300 N Silverbell Rd., Tucson 85745

Website: <https://www.tucsonaz.gov/Departments/Parks-and-Recreation/Parks/Christopher-Columbus-Park>

eBird Hotspot link: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L267156>

I had heard a lot about Christopher Columbus Park, and I finally visited there in early January. Silverbell Lake is a larger body of water than you'll find in most city parks, and the numbers and variety of birds there reflect

that. If you've already been to some of the other places on the list, and/or if you're especially interested in waterfowl, give this one a try.

There are several parking lots; check this map to choose the lot near Ramada #5. On this map, that lot is just above and to the right of the name of the park. We will meet there on the edge of Silverbell Lake. We'll walk all the way around Silverbell Lake counterclockwise, there's a flat earthen path.



Sweetwater Wetlands Park

Monday, February 19 8:00 to 10:00 am

AND

Friday, March 8 8:00 am to 10:00 am

2511 W. Sweetwater Drive, Tucson 85705

Website: <https://www.tucsonaz.gov/Departments/Water/Water-Projects-Programs/Sweetwater-Wetlands>

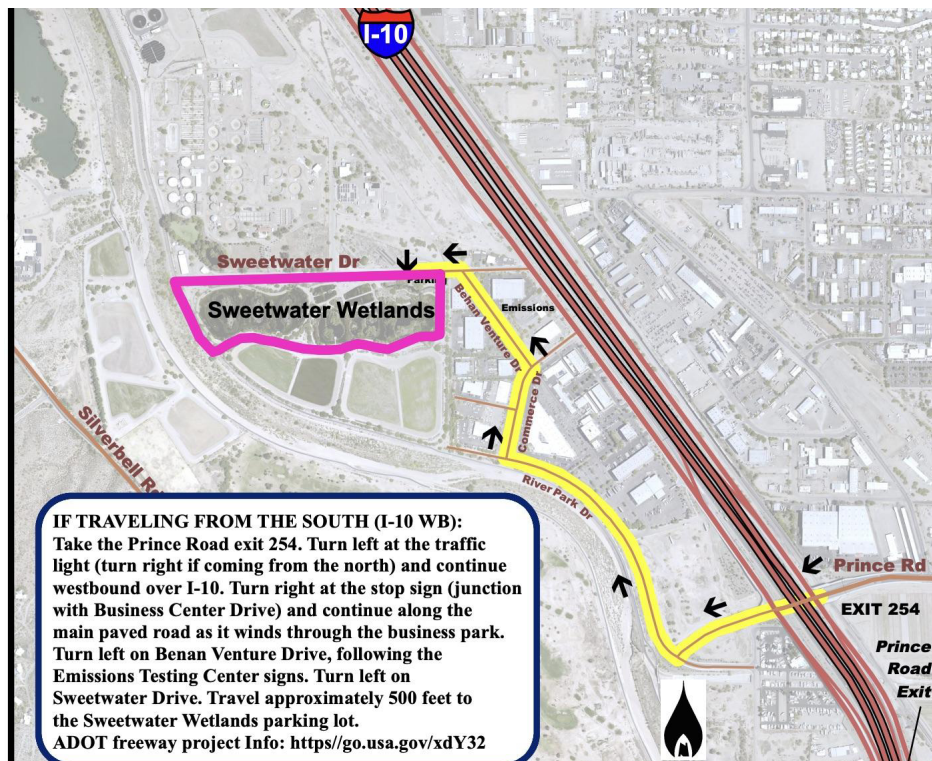
eBird Hotspot link: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L208918>

Sweetwater Wetlands Park is probably the most popular place to go birding in Tucson, and has a large variety of bird species during all seasons of the

year due to its varied habitats. If you have never been birding here, I highly recommend it! We'll do two trips here, one in February and one in March. In February we may see more waterfowl, but when we go in March there will be some spring migrants passing through on their way north.

Sweetwater Wetlands is just west of I-10's Prince Road exit. There are parking lots on either side of Sweetwater Drive; if the one closest to the park is full, park just across the street. We will meet at the northeast corner of the park by the restrooms (look for a green kiosk) and walk counterclockwise around the park. Trails are a combination of paved and packed earth, with some gravel and a few small slopes.

Here's a map, but your phone's map app will work fine to get you to the street address. If you Google its name, be aware there's another park with the same name in Gainesville, FL (that's not it).



El Rio Open Space Preserve - Sitting/standing trip

Friday, February 23 8:30 am to 10:00 am

10190 N Coachline Blvd., Marana 85743

Website's map: [10190 N. Coachline Blvd; Marana, AZ 85743](#) | [DIRECTIONS](#)

Website: <https://www.maranaaz.gov/elrio>

eBird Hotspot link: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L350281>

El Rio Open Space Preserve, like Sweetwater Wetlands, is a constructed area that combines water management with wildlife view. Its lake with surrounding wetland areas is in Marana along the Santa Cruz River, west of I-10 between the Twin Peaks and Avra Valley Road exits. You drive through a residential subdivision to get there, use your mapping app to get to the address. Note that it is not filled with water year round, only in some seasons; I'll verify before we go that there's water there when we'll be there.

This is a sitting/standing Field Trip; our group will stay on the viewing platform above the water just a few steps from the parking area. It has benches, and I'll also bring folding chairs so everyone who wants to sit can sit. This is a great spot for waterfowl, and maybe even some shorebirds.

Agua Caliente Regional Park

Monday, February 26 8:00 am to 10:00 am

12325 E Roger Rd., Tucson 85749

Website: <https://www.pima.gov/1244/Agua-Caliente-Park>

eBird Hotspot link: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L128870>

Agua Caliente Regional Park is on the east side of Tucson, 19 miles from OLLI's Tucson campus. This distinctive park is managed by Pima County. It's got perennial warm spring ponds that host a rich mix of plants and animals including many resident and migrating birds. If you live on the East side of Tucson and have never been here, consider choosing this trip so

you'll have a guided walk for your first visit, then you can come again and again on your own.

This spot also has a variety of habitats: A deeper pond near the parking lot, then a lovely Mesquite bosque forest to pass through on your way to shallower ponds in the back. The main pond at Agua Caliente is surrounded by Palm trees, which the Gila Woodpeckers and House Finches adore.

We'll meet in the parking lot and walk down to the large pond. If you're late, meet us near the main large pond. There are rest rooms; trails are a mix of paved and flat earth.



Historic Canoa Ranch

Friday, March 1 8:00 am to 10:00 am

5375 S. I-19 Frontage Road, Green Valley 85614

Website: <https://www.pima.gov/1253/Historic-Canoa-Ranch>

eBird Hotspot link: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1115897>

Canoa Ranch Conservation Park is on the campus of the Historic Canoa Ranch. It's a great place to see a lot of birds in the desert because it's also got water. There's a lovely pond you can walk all the way around.

It's another Pima County Park, and they have done a lot of work to restore a grassland habitat area next to the pond as well. This swampy, grassy area attracts additional varied species of birds.

It's about a 50 minute drive each way from Tucson, and about 10 minutes' drive south down I-19 from OLLI's Green Valley campus. If you would like to carpool, I'll be sending you a list of names and emails of folks assigned to this group so you can reach out to one another ahead of time to coordinate. Porta Potties available. Park at the far end of the parking lot, we will meet there and start walking counterclockwise around the pond, you'll see us and can catch up if you arrive late. Stop for a bite in Green Valley on your way home to Tucson, if you like!

Sweetwater Wetlands Park

Friday, March 8 8:00 am to 10:00 am

See description above for February 19 date

Santa Rita Lodge at Madera Canyon - Sitting/standing trip

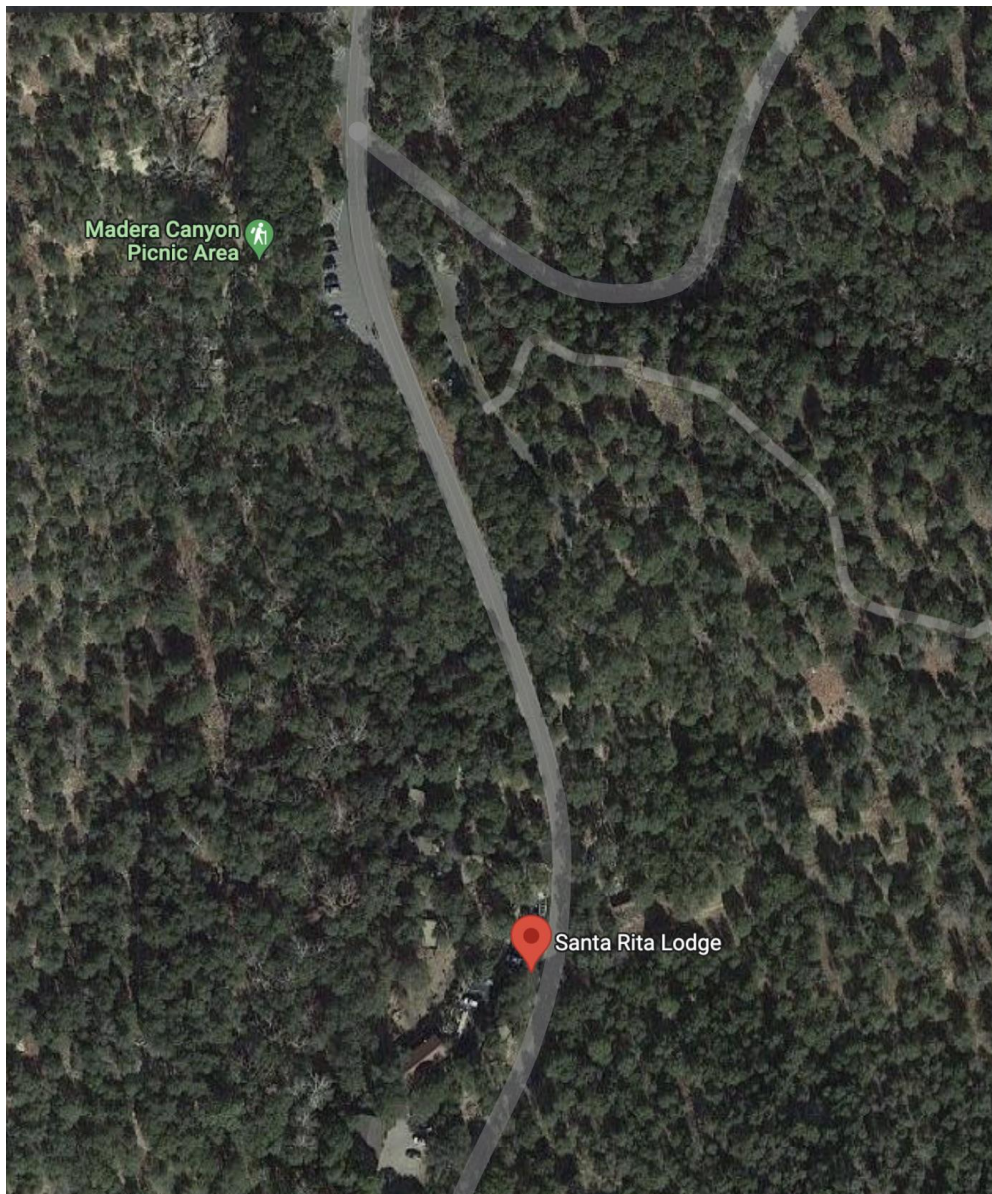
Monday, March 11 8:00 am to 10:00 am

1218 S Madera Canyon Road, Madera Canyon 85614

Website: <https://www.santaritalodge.com/>

eBird Hotspot link: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L268114>

The Santa Rita Lodge hotspot is at the end of Madera Canyon Road in Madera Canyon, AZ, which is in the Santa Rita Mountains outside Green Valley. Madera Canyon is 46 miles away, a full hour's drive from OLLI in Tucson, but well worth the trip if you've never been there and to see birds you won't spot in town. The brown dirt area at the bottom of the photo below is set up with lots of bird feeders. It's sunken below the level of the road so you can sit in benches along the edge and see the birds at eye level. There's even a gift and coffee shop at that spot that opens about 10:00.



There are very few parking spaces near the feeder and coffee shop area. If those are full, you can park farther back at the Madera Canyon Picnic Area (the restrooms are across the road from that parking area).

Carpooling is highly recommended; I'll send you a list of names and emails of folks assigned to this group so you can reach out to one another to coordinate. The U.S. Forest Service charges an \$8 day fee for parking. Be sure to bring the correct amount of cash or a check because change cannot be issued. If you have a National Park Senior or Annual Pass, put that on your dashboard and you don't need to pay for a day parking pass.

Because its elevation is 5000 feet and its latitude's a bit south of Tucson, the Santa Rita Lodge feeders attract different species than you'll see in Tucson. It will also be cooler at this elevation, so bring layers (especially since you'll be sitting down). Stop for a bite in Green Valley on your way home to Tucson, if you like!

See my email dated January 28, 2024 to RSVP for your first and second choice trips. RSVP to laura.d.couchman@gmail.com by February 3 to answer these questions:

1. Will you be able to join us for a Field Trip? (if No, that's all you need to reply)
2. First Choice trip: DATE and PLACE
3. Second Choice trip: DATE and PLACE
4. Your name
5. Name(s) of any fellow OLLI folks who you will be carpooling with, so they can be assigned to the same trip. Also, if you are mobility-challenged and would like to bring a friend who's not in the class to drive or to assist, that's FINE! Please send me your companion's name along with your RSVP. And if there's anything else you think I need to know, tell me.