

A. Mittry Lake

Habitat

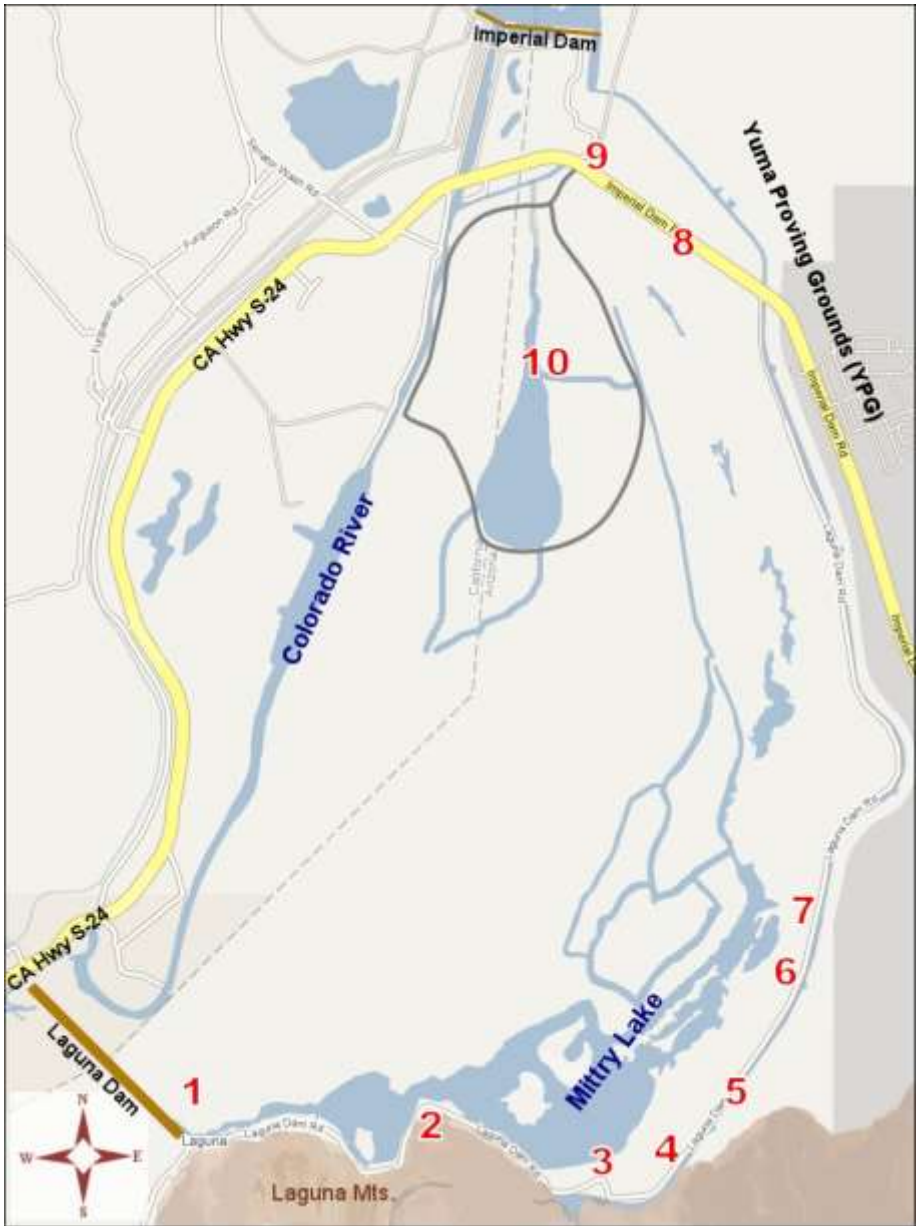
- Riparian
- Desert trees, scrub, and mountains
- Open water
- Marsh

Target Birds

- Grebes: Pied-billed, Eared, Clark's and Western (resident)
- Rails: Black and Clapper (resident), Virginia, and Sora (wintering)
- Least Bittern (resident)
- Plovers: Snowy and Semipalmated (migrant)
- Terns: Black, Forster's, and Caspian
- Osprey (winter)
- Eagles: Bald and Golden (rare, winter)
- Western Screech-Owl (resident)
- Common Poorwill (breeds, rarely winters)
- Red-naped and Red-breasted Sapsuckers (winter)
- Ladder-backed and Gila Woodpeckers (resident)
- Willow Flycatcher (migrant)
- Ash-throated Flycatcher (breeds)
- Crissal Thrasher (resident)
- Western and eastern warblers (winter, migration)
- Abert's Towhee (resident)

General Description

Just 30 minutes northeast of Yuma, AZ, the Colorado River spills over Imperial Dam and pools behind Laguna Dam to form Mittry Lake and the Laguna Division Conservation Area. This area of running water, backwaters, Mittry Lake, 2400 acres of marshes, willow and cottonwood groves, and surrounding desert is a magnet for resident and migrating birds. It's a large area bordered by several gravel roads, so access via car or truck is easy. With the use of a canoe or boat, an entirely new aquatic realm opens up—this is the best way to see Clapper Rail and Least Bitterns. In late summer and early fall visit this area to see a fine array of dragonflies and damselflies. The area is also heavily used by fishermen and hunters in the cooler months, so waterfowl become much harder to find once hunting season starts in late October.



Mittry Lake

Birding Suggestions

1) Betty's Kitchen

This is a fine spot in all seasons for a variety of passerines. See the prior chapter for a detailed bird guide to this location.

2) Mittry Lake Shoreline

At several points along the route between **Areas 1** and **2** you can pull off and look out over Mittry Lake. Look for gulls, terns, and waterfowl during winter and migration. Both Western and Clark's Grebes are present. In areas of thick cattails you may hear Least Bittern and Clapper Rail. At **Area 2** are a fishing dock, a picnic area, and a boat launch that provide good vantage points over the lake. In addition to grebes and waterfowl, look for Black, Forster's, and Caspian Terns. A rare Common Tern visited here in late summer of 2007.



3) Mittry Lake Overlook

From this high point you have a great view over a watery marsh that is very good for hearing Common Moorhen, American Coot, Least Bittern, Virginia Rail, and Sora. In the winter look over the open water for a variety of grebes and waterfowl. Lining the shoreline of Mittry Lake and the Gila Gravity Canal are mesquites and other trees. Migration can bring all kinds of unusual birds: Eurasian Wigeon (winter), Magnificent Frigatebird (late summer), Gray Flycatcher (migration), and Palm Warbler (migration) to name but a few. In June of 2007 we found five juvenile Wood Storks resting in the marsh. Years ago Black Rail was found here, but there is too much standing water now—still, it doesn't hurt to check for them each season. On the south side of the road is an impoundment formed by the Gila Gravity Canal; check here for wigeon, other ducks, and cormorants.

4) Tamarisk Grove and Black Rail Site

This small grove of Athel tamarisks offers some fine birds in the winter and migration. Winter may yield three varieties of sapsucker. This is a good spot to look for Hermit Warbler in mid to late April,

as well as the other common spring warblers and flycatchers. Look for Blue Grosbeak here in spring and summer.

Drive down one of the dirt roads/trails towards Mittry Lake for rails, warblers, and flycatchers. Black Rail is a moist-soil species; don't look it in areas with a lot of standing water. From here north to Hidden Shores RV Park, listen for this secretive sparrow-sized bird in wet areas with bulrushes and swampy vegetation. April is probably the best time to hear it's familiar "Ki-Ki-Kerr" song, but it may call spontaneously or respond to tapes at any time of year. All the rails (Clapper, Black, Virginia, and Sora) can be heard in this area—spring is the easiest time and winter is the toughest time. The trails in this area are very good for Yellow-breasted Chat and flycatchers. Late May is good for Willow Flycatcher.

5) Gila Gravity Canal

This canal runs from the east end of Imperial Dam downhill to the Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation District, supplying water to the farming communities in the Gila Valley east of Yuma. Varying water levels make the canal interesting all year long. I've found Willet, Long-billed Dowitcher, Pacific Loon, Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes, Cinnamon Teal, and a variety of other waterfowl. Check the swallow flocks for White-throated Swift. The mesquites and palo verdes on the west side of the levee road are good for migrants; one September we found an American Redstart there.

6) Boat Launch

From the levee you can see pockets of open water surrounded by cattails. Look for gulls, terns, and both Brown and White Pelicans. Just north of the boat launch is a bulrush marsh that has breeding Black Rail. The desert scrub and scattered mesquites harbor typical Sonoran Desert birdlife: Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Ash-throated Flycatcher.

7) Rail Overlook

From this vantage point you can hear Clapper, Virginia, and Black Rails. Look over the marsh for Northern Harrier, pelicans, and swallows. Looking back south along the Colorado River, you may see pelicans in some of the large pools of water. We've also seen Barn Owl patrolling here at night. Just north of this site (0.3 miles), on the other side of a small bridge, is a good site for Western Screech-Owl, which nest in a small grove of Athel tamarisks.

8) Rail Marsh

On both sides of S-24 are extensive stands of cattails and other water-loving plants. In areas where the water is shallow or where there

is only moist soil, Black Rails have established territories and bred. Early in the morning, this stretch of road is good for bobcats. Perhaps they would rather walk on the road than get their feet wet.

9) Hidden Shores Golf Course

This nice patch of green grass, mesquites, and eucalyptus trees is a magnet for wintering birds and migrants. It is a reliable spot for resident Gila Woodpecker, Inca Dove, and Vermilion Flycatcher. Because the trees and greens are so readily accessible and easy to view, birds that are otherwise hard to spot may be found here readily. Early in the day and after the snowbirds have left, this little 9-hole course is often empty (of golfers), so birding is easy and safe. Migration can bring rarities like Bendire's Thrasher, which I found hopping on the lawn like a robin. In the fall of 2012 Paul Lehman found a Ruddy Ground-Dove posing nicely along the western edge of the course, which remained for several days. Look for the following in season:

Winter: Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Chipping Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco

Spring and fall: warblers, Willow and other flycatchers, vireos, tanagers, buntings, orioles, and sparrows

Summer: White-winged Dove, Anna's and Black-chinned Hummingbirds, Western Kingbird, and Ash-throated Flycatcher

Year round: Barn Owl, Gila Woodpecker, Vermilion Flycatcher, Black Phoebe, and Verdin

10) Laguna Division Conservation Area

This 1200-acre conservation area is one of ten projects on the Lower Colorado River created under the Multi-Species Conservation Program (MSCP) to restore and create habitat for threatened and endangered species (see www.lcrmscp.gov/conservation/laguna.html). Although not officially open yet, this large site already has water flowing through it, and has the potential to rival and exceed the birding potential of the old Dateland Shrimp Ponds! A five-mile gravel perimeter road loops around a lake and streams that flow through this area, which will have 200 acres of open water and marsh, 430 acres of cottonwood/willow trees, and 400 acres of mesquite trees when it's completed in the next year. Most of the area lies in Arizona, but a western slice does stretch into California.

In just two hours on the morning of Aug 17, 2013 I saw the following shorebirds in this area:

11 Snowy Plovers

44 Semipalmated Plovers

23 Killdeer
32 Black-Necked Stilts
8 Spotted Sandpipers
1 Solitary Sandpiper
7 Greater Yellowlegs
1 Willet
10 Long-Billed Curlews
6 Marbled Godwits
1 Sanderling
78 Least Sandpipers
1 Baird's Sandpiper
8 Long-Billed Dowitchers
3 Wilson's Phalaropes
1 Red-Necked Phalarope

Also present here during the same time period were the following typical summering birds:

Eared Grebe
Western Grebe
Least Bittern
Black-crowned Night Heron
Greater Roadrunner
Western Kingbird
Black Phoebe
Vermilion Flycatcher
Loggerhead Shrike
Verdin
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher
Blue Grosbeak
Common Yellowthroat
Yellow-breasted Chat
Abert's Towhee

Two days later we were searching for a previously-reported Sooty Shearwater on Mitty Lake, and decided to visit this area. It was a great decision, since we found an immature Brown Booby!

In early October 2013 the water was filled with 7 species of ducks and three migrating Greater White-fronted Geese. Two Dunlin were feeding with numerous Least Sandpipers.

Driving Directions to Mittry Lake

From the intersection of I-8 and 16th Street in Yuma:

- Drive east on 16th Street (Hwy 95) for 5.5 miles to Avenue 7E (Circle K and Chevron stations).
- Turn left on Avenue 7E and drive north (follow the road as it winds north and east) until the asphalt turns into gravel, 8.6 miles. About 0.4 miles up the gravel road you'll see a turn off to the left for Betty's Kitchen (**Area 1**).
- Follow the winding gravel north about 1.0 miles to the picnic area and boat launch (**Area 2**). Don't stop on this road unless there is room to pull over—too many blind curves and fast drivers.
- Drive another 0.6 miles up to an overlook above Mittry Lake (**Area 3**). A swamp is below the overlook, and a small lake formed by the Gila Gravity Canal is on the east side of the road.
- Continue on this road, which becomes the levee road for the Gila Gravity Canal (**Area 5**) on your right (as you travel north). Half a mile beyond the overlook, look for a road that dips down towards Mittry Lake (on your left) from the levee road. Follow this road 0.1 miles to the small tamarisk grove (**Area 4**).
- Back on the levee road, drive north about 1.0 miles to the turn-off for another boat launch. The launch is about 0.1 miles down from the levee (**Area 6**).
- Back on the levee road, drive another 0.5 miles to a pull-off on the left that overlooks a tiny pond and a section of huge cattail marsh (**Area 7**).
- Another 2.5 miles takes you to California Highway S-24, which runs west and south to Winterhaven, just north of Yuma. Turn left here and you'll see marsh on both sides of the road (**Area 8**).
- From the levee turnoff, drive 0.8 miles to the first right turn. Take this right and drive 0.3 miles north to the Hidden Shores Golf Course (**Area 9**).
- The entrance to the new Laguna Division Conservation Area is across from the Hidden Shores RV Park (**Area 10**).

Site Notes

Ownership

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)
- Arizona Game and Fish Department
- Hidden Shores RV Park and Golf Course is privately owned

Fees

- To visit Betty's Kitchen there is a BLM fee of \$5 per person
- No fees elsewhere

Restrooms

- Mitty Lake boat launch (**Area 2**)
- Across from the store and diner at Hidden Shores RV Park

Food

- Chevron and Circle K convenience stores (13 miles south)

Gas: Chevron and Circle K along Ave 7E (13 miles south)



American Kestrel