

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Imperial

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*





*The 25,768-acre  
Imperial National  
Wildlife Refuge is  
one of more than  
550 refuges throughout  
the United States.  
These national  
wildlife refuges are  
administered by the  
Department of the  
Interior, Fish and  
Wildlife Service.  
The Fish and Wildlife  
Service mission is  
to work with others  
“to conserve fish  
and wildlife and  
their habitat.*



*This blue goose,  
designed by J.N.  
“Ding” Darling,  
has become the  
symbol of the  
National Wildlife  
Refuge System.*

## **Welcome**

Imperial National Wildlife Refuge protects wildlife habitat along 30 miles of the lower Colorado River in Arizona and California, including the last unchannelized section before the river enters Mexico. The river and its associated backwater lakes and wetlands are a green oasis, contrasting with the surrounding desert mountains.

## **Refuge Highlights**

Wetland wildlife is most abundant in winter, when ‘snowbirds’ such as cinnamon teal and northern pintail use the refuge. During the summer months, look for permanent residents such as great egrets and muskrat.

In the desert, wildlife such as black-tailed jackrabbits and western whiptail lizards are plentiful. Watch at dawn and dusk for desert bighorn sheep and mule deer heading to the river for a drink.

## **Wilderness**

More than 15,000 acres of Imperial National Wildlife Refuge is federally designated wilderness. Wilderness is protected to ensure that nature, not people, is the primary influence on this quiet, scenic place.



*Scorpionweed*

Photograph by Sheldon Damberg, USFWS





### *Imperial NWR*

Photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth

## **Forest in the Desert?**

At one time, the banks of the Colorado River were lined with cottonwood and willow forests, sustained by the river's natural periodic flooding. Animals depended on this green forest oasis for breeding, resting, feeding, and shade.

Woodcutting during the steamboat era, clearing for agriculture, wild fire, exotic plants like salt cedar, and use of dams for flood prevention have devastated cottonwood and willow stands along the lower Colorado River. Some animals that depend on these forests, such as the southwestern willow flycatcher, have become endangered.

Refuge staff are working with other agencies and organizations to plant cottonwood and willow trees. From the observation tower, look for patches of restored forest.

## **Marsh Management**

Ducks, geese, shorebirds, and other waterbirds flock to the lower Colorado River each year to spend the winter. Refuge staff and volunteers restore wetlands, protect backwater lakes, manage marsh units, and farm croplands to provide food and resting areas for these winter residents.



### *Cinnamon Teal*

Photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth

## **Things to do at the Refuge**

The Visitor Center is open year-round Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm. From November 15 through March 31, it is also open Saturdays and Sundays from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. Enjoy the exhibits, desert garden and observation tower.

Drive through the Sonoran desert landscape to access the observation points and the Painted Desert Trail. If you intend to drive further than the Painted Desert Trailhead, a 4-wheel drive vehicle is recommended. Check with the Visitor Center for road conditions.

### *Observation Points*

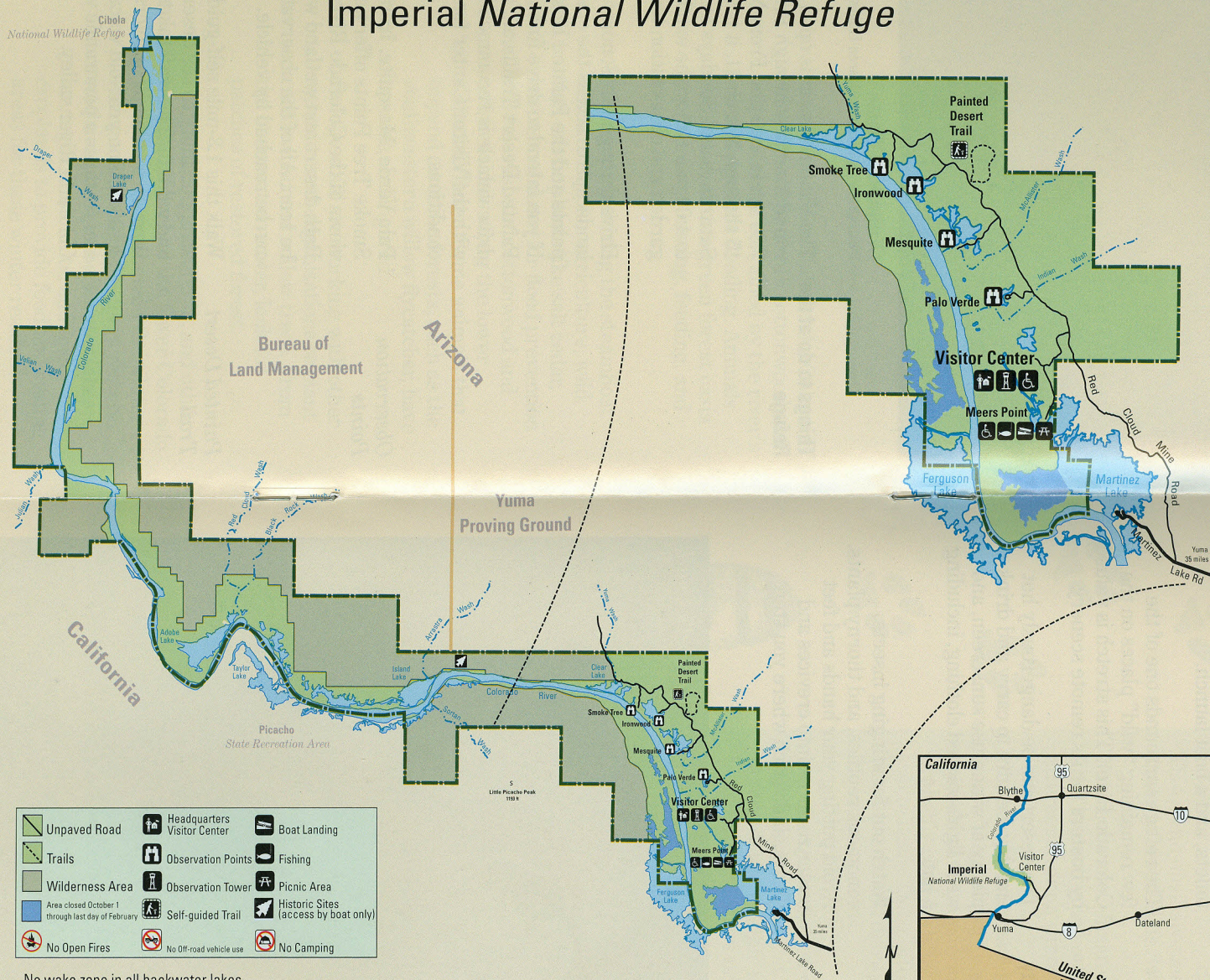
Palo Verde, Mesquite, Ironwood, and Smoke Tree Points offer beautiful views of the Colorado River valley. Both desert and wetland wildlife may be seen. All of the observation points can be reached by vehicle.

### *Painted Desert Trail*

Walk this 1.3-mile self-guided trail for an opportunity to see desert plants and wildlife. The trail takes you through a rainbow of colors left by 20-30 million year-old volcanic activity and features a panoramic view of the Colorado River valley.



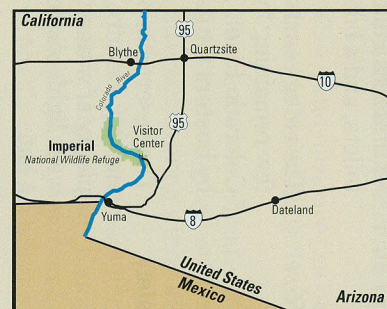
# Imperial National Wildlife Refuge



No wake zone in all backwater lakes.

Help protect the fragile desert by staying on designated roads.

SCALE 1 1/2 1 2 3 4 Miles





### *Meers Point*

Looking for a quiet place to canoe or fish? Meers Point has shaded tables, toilets, and a boat launch.

### *Colorado River*

The refuge surrounds one of the few remaining "wild" places on the Colorado River. This stretch is valued by boaters for its remote scenery.

### **For Your Safety**

The desert can be dangerously hot and dry. Be sure to carry and drink plenty of water; use sunscreen, and wear light-colored clothing, including a hat.

Watch out for stinging insects, venomous reptiles, and thorny plants. Avoid putting your hands and feet under rocks or into crevices and plants, and watch where you step or sit.



*Gambel's Quail*

Photograph by Thomas A. Gatz, USFWS

### **Wildlife Watching Tips**

Dawn and dusk are the best times to see wildlife.

This is a warm climate, so 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. Don't offer snacks; your lunch could disrupt wild digestive systems.

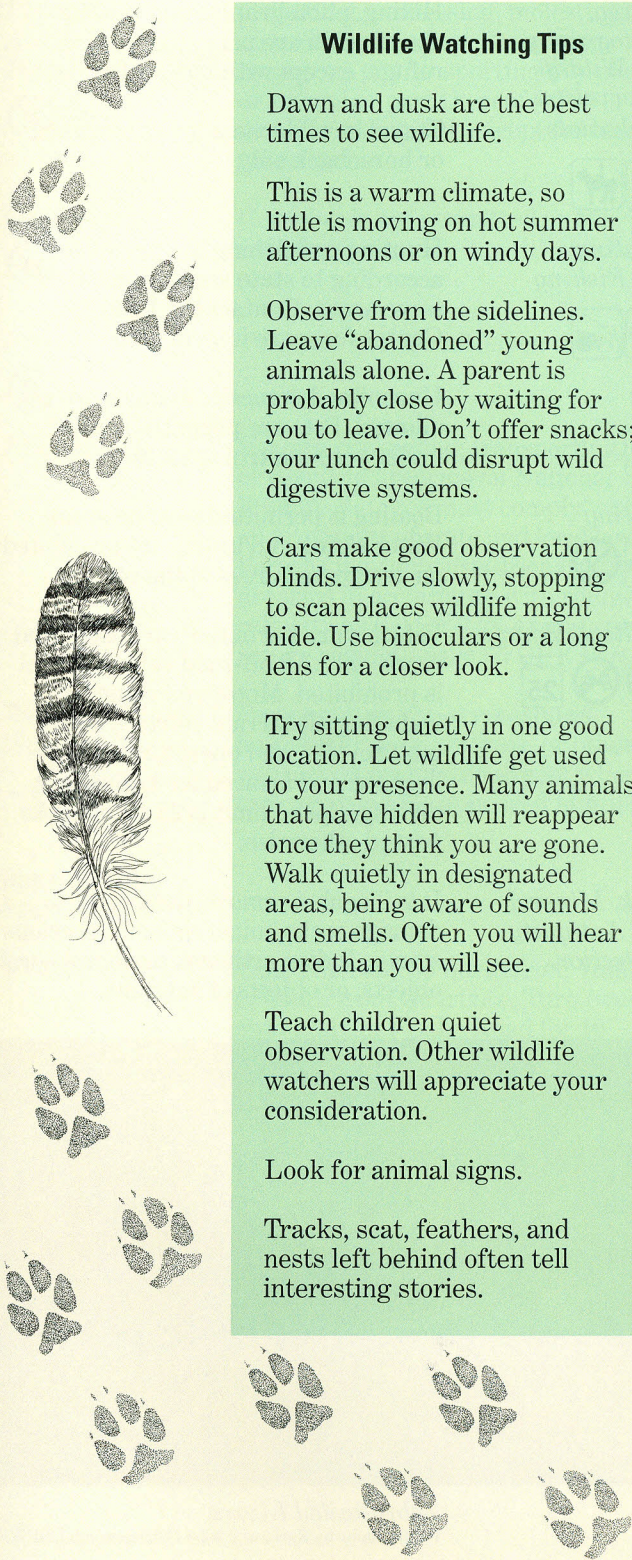
Cars make good observation blinds. Drive slowly, stopping to scan places wildlife might hide. Use binoculars or a long lens for a closer look.

Try sitting quietly in one good location. Let wildlife get used to your presence. Many animals that have 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.





*Hiking,  
Photography,  
and Wildlife  
Observation  
Wilderness*



Hiking, photography, and wildlife observation are permitted on the refuge, except within closed areas.

Travel in wilderness areas is by foot or horseback only.

*Hunting  
and Fishing*



Hunting and fishing are permitted, according to state regulations, in some areas. Contact the Visitor Center for more information.

*Pets*



Unconfined domestic animals are not allowed. Pets are permitted only if under your control at all times.

*Boating*



Boating is permitted in some areas. Water skiing and tubing are prohibited on designated areas of the refuge.

*Off-Road Vehicles*



Vehicles are permitted on designated roads only. All off-road vehicle travel is prohibited. Motorized vehicles, including all-terrain vehicles and motorcycles, and operators must be licensed and insured for highway driving. Speed limit is 25 mph unless posted otherwise.

*Rock, Mineral,  
and Antiquity  
Protection*

It is illegal to remove, deface, or damage rocks, minerals, semi-precious stones, Indian artifacts, paleontological objects, or objects of antiquity.



*Zebra-tailed Lizard*

Photography by Karen and John Hollingsworth, USFWS

*Plant and  
Animal  
Protection*



Collecting, possessing, molesting, disturbing, injuring, destroying, removing, or transporting any plant or animal or part thereof (alive or dead) is prohibited, except for legally taken game.

*Camping*



Camping is not permitted on the refuge.

*Fires*



Fires are not permitted on the refuge.

*Firearms*



Persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms on National Wildlife Refuges must comply with all provisions of state and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50 CFR 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 CFR Part 32).

*Weapons Other  
than Firearms*



Possession or use of crossbows, bow and arrows, air guns, or other weapons is prohibited except when they are used for approved hunting.

**Imperial NWR  
Facts**

*Where is it?*

Take Highway 95 north from Yuma or south from Quartzite. Turn (west) onto Martinez Lake Road for 10 miles. Turn right (north) onto Red Cloud Mine Road. Follow the brown refuge signs approximately 3.5 miles to the Visitor Center.

*When was it  
established?*

February 14, 1941

*How big is it?*

25,768 acres.

*Why is it here?*

As a refuge and breeding area for migratory birds and other wildlife.



**Imperial National Wildlife Refuge**  
12812 Wildlife Way  
Yuma, Arizona 85364  
928/783-3371  
928/783-0652 Fax

[www.fws.gov/southwest](http://www.fws.gov/southwest)

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**  
[www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)

**For Refuge Information**  
1 800/344-WILD

**Arizona Relay Service**  
1 800/367-8939

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