

Vistoso Trails Nature Preserve Field Guide



Vistoso Trails Nature Preserve

In June 2018, Vistoso Golf Course went out of business, leaving behind 208 acres of intact Sonoran Desert amidst greens, fairways, golf cart pathways, and other course features. **Preserve Vistoso** was established in 2019 as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, dedicated to the preservation of the land. After more than two years of community engagement, fundraising, and a partnership with The Conservation Fund, Preserve Vistoso **achieved its goal**. The former golf course was purchased and a conservation easement was implemented in early 2022.

The **Preserve Vistoso Board of Directors** (led by **President Gayle Mateer**), **The Conservation Fund** (with leadership from **Mike Ford**, The Conservation Fund's Southwest Director), and the **Oro Valley Town Council** (with leadership from **Mayor Joe Winfield**) all played crucial roles in this process. After an extensive clean-up and fire risk mitigation, the land was transferred to the Town of Oro Valley in July 2022 and is now open to the public under its new name, **Vistoso Trails Nature Preserve**.



The Field Guide

This field guide is not intended to be comprehensive. From late winter through the summer of 2022 community members spent countless hours in **Vistoso Trails Nature Preserve**, documenting the flora and fauna living there. The community members used **iNaturalist**, a web-based tool for observing and identifying wild organisms, to document what they found. This guide draws on that data and is intended to help users of the preserve identify what they see while exploring. We have focused on **the most common and most remarkable species**. Those who spend a great deal of time in the preserve are sure to see more than is pictured here. An appendix follows with a more extensive (and growing) list of species found in this remarkable natural setting.

Photography

All photos in this guide were taken either in **Vistoso Trails Nature Preserve** or in close proximity to the preserve by photographers familiar with the area. In the few cases where photos from within the preserve were not used, the reason is simply that high enough quality photos from the preserve were not immediately available. Most of the photos are the author's, but special credit is owed to Oro Valley-based photographers **Eliseu Cavalcante** and **Gordy Parkhill** for their assistance in documenting the biodiversity of the preserve and for the inclusion of their photographs.

Author's Note

I live just a block from one of the entrances to Vistoso Trails and I am in the preserve on my bicycle daily, often with my wife and children (**Kip** and **Bell**). The existence of the preserve has been an immensely positive factor in my life and for my family. We love nature and the preserve allows us to experience the best of the Sonoran Desert safely and conveniently. It is a luxury and a privilege to have Vistoso Trails Nature Preserve here in Oro Valley.

Aside from the photographers credited above, much credit is also due to my wife **Emilia** for giving me the gift of time. Without that, I would never have been able to create this guide. Credit is also due to my friend and co-conspirator **Andy Hogan**, a docent at Tohono Chul and Sabino Canyon who has guided me and taught me much along the way. Andy's wonderful spouse **Joanne Hogan**, a fellow docent, assisted with editing the text. Thank you!

Jake Smith



Oro Valley, July 2022



How You Can Help

First and foremost, take care of the preserve! **The ecosystem is still recovering** — and will be recovering for decades. Avoid damaging plants or other life in the preserve. Don't litter. Please pick up any litter you see. Keep dogs leashed. Obey all posted preserve rules. If you would like to contribute to documenting the wildlife found in the preserve, we encourage you to join iNaturalist at [inaturalist.org/](https://www.inaturalist.org/). It is free of charge and benefits science and conservation efforts. It's also a lot of fun!

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Map

Vistoso Nature Preserve

Legend

- Former golf course holes
- Restrooms (closed at this time)
- Walking/biking paths
- Underpass



Using the Guide

At the start of each section (mammals, birds, reptiles, etc.), you will find a list of pictured species and the page numbers on which they occur. Then within each section species are very roughly arranged in terms of how common they are, with some additional grouping also used. For example, snakes are with snakes (from most common snake to least common snake) within the reptiles section. Raptors are with raptors in the birds section.

An index can be found at the back of the book in which all species pictured are listed. There is an additional appendix with a comprehensive and growing list of all species sighted in the preserve.

Care has been taken to choose photos representative of each species, but note that there is often **significant variability and sexual dimorphism** within a species. This cannot be fully accounted for within the scope of this guidebook.

Each species pictured in the guide has a small block of notes accompanying it. One of the categories of notes is **Sightings**. This is intended to convey the relative frequency with which a species is observed. This exists for most animals, but not for insects, plants, or fungi. These are the rough definitions for the **Sightings** notes:

Abundant: A preserve user will almost certainly see one or more of these animals every time they use the preserve (walking or riding at least 2-3 miles).

Common: A preserve user will almost certainly see one or more of these animals 1-3 times a week assuming they use the preserve daily (walking or riding at least 2-3 miles each time).

Occasional: A preserve user will likely see one or more of these animals once or twice a month assuming they use the preserve nearly daily (walking or riding at least 2-3 miles each time).

Uncommon: Sightings are few and far between at best and difficult to predict.

If **Seasonal** accompanies any of these labels, it indicates the animal is present in the preserve (or visible in the preserve) only at certain times of the year. In those cases the definition applies only at that time. These definitions are very rough. Luck, attention to your surroundings, and time spent in the preserve are ultimately the main factors in whether or not you will spot most of these species. Users visiting the preserve less frequently, or walking or riding only very short sections, will of course see less.