Without a doubt, the best birding spot close to downtown Santa Fe is the portion of Santa Fe Canyon at the end of Upper Canyon Road. The Nature Conservancy’s Santa Fe Canyon Preserve and the Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary form a contiguous parcel of 660 acres that is protected for its striking landscapes and wildlife habitat. It is also designated as an Important Bird Area by Birdlife International. Bounded by thousands of acres of national forest land, the Preserve and Sanctuary provide an easily accessible and peaceful sanctuary for plants, animals and visitors that is worth visiting in all seasons.

To reach the area, take Alameda St. east from downtown Santa Fe. Turn left onto Upper Canyon Rd. to the lower parking lot just off Cerro Gordo Rd. or to the upper parking lot at the Audubon Center. Points of interest and what to expect are described below starting from the upper lot, but all the areas can be reached from either lot.
Hummingbird activity can be intense, with nesting Black-chinned and Broad-tailed and migrant Rufous and Calliope. Many birds frequent the feeders summer and winter including Western Scrub Jay, House Finch, Canyon and Spotted Towhees, both Mountain and Black-capped Chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers.

In addition to the usual meadow birds, keep an eye on the sky for Cooper’s and Red-tailed Hawks in summer, Sharp-shinned Hawk and Merlin in winter, Peregrine Falcon, Swainson’s Hawk, and Osprey in migration, and Golden Eagle.

Pygmy Nuthatch, Steller’s Jay, Mountain Chickadee, and other montane species can be found here all year. Grace’s and Black-throated Gray Warbler in summer. Townsend’s Warbler occurs in the fall and Wild Turkey leaves tracks in the snow in winter.

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This historic home of painter Randall Davey was originally the first sawmill in Santa Fe until Davey remodeled it into a residence in 1920. The sanctuary provides birding opportunities on its landscaped grounds, particularly at a number of feeders near the buildings, as well as in natural areas on the property.

This shade shelter is often used for educational programs but offers a glimpse of the dam on the Santa Fe River that impounds Nichols Reservoir, part of the city of Santa Fe’s current water system. The shade is a welcome respite on hot summer days and provides good views of meadow habitat and the upper Santa Fe River Canyon.

As at the Upper Meadow (7), there are abundant perches nearby to be checked for jays and Clark’s Nutcracker. Nuthatches may be found, as well as Juniper Titmouse, Townsend’s Solitaire and other pinyon-juniper birds. Gray Flycatcher may be found as well.

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After visiting the gardens and feeders, return to the nature shop and follow the stone stairs up the slope. Please pay the $2 trail fee at the store or in the donation box at the trail head.

This open flat field is recovering more slowly than the rest of the preserve, possibly because of compacted or highly disturbed soils.

Look for passerines such as warblers, vireos, and finches. Golden-crowned Kinglet and Cedar Waxwing may be present in winter and Green-tailed Towhee in migration.

In spring you may get your feet wet here and in summer, the willows can be very thick. Look for passerines such as warblers, vireos, and finches. Golden-crowned Kinglet and Cedar Waxwing may be present in winter and Green-tailed Towhee in migration.

This trail continues up the hill, and forks left to Bear Canyon climbing through mature Ponderosa Pine and mixed conifer forest.