

# Follow the Pacific Flyway in California State Parks

Millions of birds – more than 350 species - follow the Pacific Flyway. They travel this great avian highway each year from the Bering Straight to South America, flying over, and wintering in many California State Parks along the way. Birds migrate south as early as August and migrate north as early as March.

State Parks provide habitats along the flyway, including Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve, Millerton Lake State Recreation Area, Folsom Lake State Recreation Area, Salton Sea State Recreation Area, Picacho State Recreation Area, Humboldt Redwoods State Park, Standish-Hickey State Recreation Area, Benbow Lake State Recreation Area, Richardson Grove State Park, and many others. Birds use these areas as food stops, resting areas, or wintering in warmer climates. Visitors can follow the birds from park to park.

Visitors can find fascinating species of birds at parks during specific times of the year, such as bald eagles in winter at Millerton Lake State Recreation Area, Folsom Lake State Recreation Area, Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area, Humboldt Redwoods State Park, and Benbow Lake State Recreation Area. Also in winter, visitors can find herons and egrets on the Eel River and night herons and Canada geese at the Salton Sea State Recreation Area.

Here's a sample of what visitors can find in State Parks:

On the Lower Colorado River, visitors to **Picacho State Recreation Area** (IMPERIAL COUNTY) can find heron and egrets along with an occasional bald eagle perched above the river. At times, pelicans are seen to share the river with human swimmers. Picacho State Recreation Area is on the California side of the Colorado River, 29 miles north of Winterhaven. Call the Salton Sea office at (760) 393-3059 for information.

The Salton Sea – State Parks' **Salton Sea State Recreation Area** (RIVERSIDE and IMPERIAL COUNTIES) – is an important wintering and staging area for migrating birds. The Salton Sea serves as a southern terminus for many of the birds. Populations of up to 1.5 million eared grebes have been documented at the sea along with up to one-half of California's wintering white-faced ibis, tens of thousands of shorebirds, waterfowl and white pelicans. More than 409 species of birds have been recorded at the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge, the largest number of species found on any national wildlife refuge in the West. Endangered species are also prominent at the sea, including Yuma clapper rail, desert pupfish and California brown pelicans. The best time to view birds at the Sea is from November through February.

Salton Sea Recreation Area is 25 miles southeast of Indio on Highway 111. The park phone number is (760) 393-3059.

#### **San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area/Los Banos Creek**

**Detention Reservoir**, west of Los Banos in MERCED COUNTY, had up to 250,000 waterfowl documented as using the reservoir as a safe haven during the winter months. The area also has had good populations of western grebes using the lakes, along with herons, egrets, various other shorebirds, and the occasional bald eagle and osprey.

Mono Lake – and **Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve**, near the town of Lee Vining in MONO COUNTY - is also a vital stop on the Pacific Flyway. Migrating eared grebes, Wilson's phalaropes, and red-necked phalaropes are among the most common of the nearly 100 species of birds found in the area. By mid-summer abundant alkali flies and brine shrimp provide an endless food supply for migrating birds. Stream delta, and near-shore wetland habitat also provide good bird habitat.

The Wilson's phalarope is one of the hardiest travelers visiting Mono Lake. About 30,000 to 80,000 of these small shorebirds arrive at Mono Lake in mid-summer after breeding in the northern U.S. and southern Canada. While at Mono

they molt their feathers and double their weight after several weeks. Leaving in stages in August and September during the cover of darkness, they depart for a journey that takes them all the way to South America. The fact that these birds fly over 3,000 non-stop miles to South America is amazing enough, but what is truly astonishing is how fast these little birds reach their destination— an unbelievable three days!

Eared grebes, diving, duck-like birds that spend their entire life on water, arrive at Mono Lake in greater numbers than any other species. Aerial surveys have revealed 1.5 - 1.8 million birds on the lake in the fall — comprising a large portion of North America's population. The grebes double, and in some cases nearly triple their weight after gorging themselves on shrimp. Many grebes end up getting too fat to fly, and must lose weight before departing for winter destinations on the Salton Sea and Gulf of California.

About 50,000 adult California gulls fly to Mono Lake from the coast each spring to nest, where island nesting sites are plentiful. Approximately 90% of the California population of this species is born at Mono Lake. The phone number of Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve is (760) 647-6331.

**Clear Lake State Park**, 3.5 miles northeast of Kelseyville in LAKE COUNTY), has a large number of resident species of birds. The area also receives visits from migratory birds, such as green heron, Canada goose, canvasback duck, greater scaup, ruddy duck, bufflehead, American goldeneye, common merganser, hooded merganser, spotted sandpiper, bald eagle, western kingbird, western wood pewee, ash-throated flycatcher, tree swallow, cliff swallow, barn swallow, ruby-crowned kinglet, hermit thrush, American robin, yellow-rumped warbler, black-throated gray warbler, Townsend's warbler, yellow warbler, black-headed grosbeak, dark-eyed junco, white-crowned sparrow, yellow-headed blackbird, northern oriole and western tanager. A less common visitor is the black and white warbler. The park phone number is (707) 279-4293.

Along the Eel River in Northern California, visitors to **Humboldt Redwoods State Park, Richardson Grove State Park, Benbow Lake State Recreation Area** and **Standish-Hickey State Recreation Area** (HUMBOLDT and MEDOCINO COUNTIES) find the great egrets strutting their stuff on the river's shore. The birds compete for space with the grumbling great blue herons. Visitors can also find the bald eagle at the river's edge or in the trees above Benbow Lake. Parks along the Eel River are about 60 miles south of Eureka. Call (707) 946-1817 or go on-line to: [www.humboldtredwoods.org](http://www.humboldtredwoods.org) for information.

Visit California State Parks on-line at [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

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