

# Field Guide

to Birds, Mammals & Wildflowers



## *Los Vaqueros Reservoir & Watershed*



CONTRA COSTA  
WATER DISTRICT

[www.ccwater.com/losvaqueros](http://www.ccwater.com/losvaqueros)

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## The Watershed

The Los Vaqueros Watershed protects nearly 20,000 acres of wildlife habitat in eastern Contra Costa County and a portion of Alameda County. The unique property is home to many protected species, including the Alameda whipsnake, California tiger salamander, California red-legged frog and the San Joaquin kit fox. The watershed occupies a unique biogeographical transition zone between coastal and interior habitats, between lowland grasslands and higher elevation woodland and chaparral habitats, and also between southern and northern elements of the Coast Ranges flora.

## For Your Safety

Natural hazards exist in the Los Vaqueros Watershed. The watershed is home to rattlesnakes, mountain lions and ticks. Incidents are rare, but can be serious. For your safety, always hike with a partner. Use caution and common sense. Watch children closely at all times. Emergency call boxes are located throughout the watershed.

# Guide to Birds

## Why Watch Birds?

An appreciation for our avian friends offers opportunities of delight and inspiration. For many of us, birdwatching, or “birding” as it is commonly called, is a source of mental and physical activity that helps to reduce the continual stress of everyday urban life.

At the Los Vaqueros Reservoir, you’ll find a variety of bird species, from raptors searching the grasslands for their next meal to waterfowl gracefully navigating the reservoir.

## Common Los Vaqueros Birds



Jean Douglas

**Golden Eagle**  
*Aquila chrysaetos*



Gerald and Buff Corsi, California Academy of Sciences

**Double-crested Cormorant**  
*Phalacrocorax auritus*

Unlike many other pastimes, birding is an easy hobby for beginners. You can start inexpensively, and there are many resources available, including clubs, field guides and websites on the Internet.

Gaining a true familiarity with local bird species is a lifetime endeavor. Because birds fly and use body signals to communicate, individual birds can demonstrate a huge variety of poses and behaviors, providing ample challenges in identification for both expert and novice birders.

Good trails for birdwatching at the Los Vaqueros Reservoir include the Kellogg Creek Trail in



Gerald and Buff Corsi, California Academy of Sciences

## Common Los Vaqueros Birds

### Killdeer

*Charadrius vociferus*



Dr. Lloyd Glenn Ingles, California Academy of Sciences

### Red-tailed Hawk

*Buteo jamaicensis*

the northern watershed and the Los Vaqueros Trail along the water's edge in the southern watershed. Both trails are fairly flat and easy for beginning hikers.



**Acorn Woodpecker**  
*Melanerpes formicivorus*

Gerald and Buff Corsi, California Academy of Sciences



**Osprey**  
*Pandion haliaetus*

David Harper



**Western Bluebird**  
*Sialia mexicana*

Alden M. Johnson, California Academy of Sciences

## Common Los Vaqueros Birds



**Great Blue Heron**

*Ardea herodias*

Gerald and Buff Corsi, California Academy of Sciences



**Snowy Egret**

*Egretta thula*

Gerald and Buff Corsi, California Academy of Sciences

## Some Other Birds You Might See

### **American Kestrel**

*Falco sparverius*

### **Barn Owl**

*Tyto alba*

### **Belted Kingfisher**

*Ceryle alcyon*

### **Burrowing Owl**

*Athene cunicularia*

### **California Quail**

*Callipepla californica*

### **Caspian Tern**

*Sterna caspia*

### **Cliff Swallow**

*Hirundo pyrrhonota*

### **Common Goldeneye**

*Bucephala clangula*

### **Dark-eyed Junco**

*Junco hyemalis*

### **Great Egret**

*Casmerodius albus*

### **Loggerhead Shrike**

*Lanius ludovicianus*

### **Mallard**

*Anas platyrhynchos*

### **Northern Flicker**

*colaptes auratus*

### **Red-winged Blackbird**

*Agelaius phoeniceus*

### **Western Kingbird**

*Tyrannus verticalis*

### **Western Meadowlark**

*Sturnella neglecta*

### **Western Scrub Jay**

*Aphelocoma coerulescens*

# Guide to Mammals

## Viewing Reservoir Wildlife

Viewing wildlife in their natural habitat can be a wonderful and educational experience. The safest and most rewarding way to view wildlife is from a distance with a pair of binoculars or a spotting scope. Observing wildlife from a distance allows the animals to stay relaxed and go about their normal behavior. It also keeps you safe, since wild animals are unpredictable and capable of hurting you.

For best results while viewing wildlife, follow the PEQ Rule: be **Patient**, **Early** and **Quiet**. Animals are most active at daybreak and in the cool

## Los Vaqueros Mammals



Gerald and Buff Corsi, California Academy of Sciences

**Mountain Lion**  
*Puma concolor*



Kim Cabrera

**Columbian Black-Tailed Deer**  
*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*

morning hours, so it is best to arrive at your viewing point early in the day. If you don't know how to select a good viewing point, ask watershed staff about the best places.

Once you select a promising viewing area, settle in and make yourself comfortable. You may be there a while before the area's wildlife feels comfortable enough to make an appearance. To ensure your own comfort, check weather reports before leaving home to make sure you are dressed appropriately. And don't forget sunscreen, a hat, drinking water and your favorite field guide.

## Los Vaqueros Mammals



**Striped Skunk**  
*Mephitis mephitis*

Dr. Lyon Glenn Ingles, California Academy of Sciences



**Badger**  
*Taxidea taxus*

Gerald and Buff Corsi, California Academy of Sciences



Finally, it is important to never feed or touch wildlife. Wild animals fed by people can get hooked on handouts and lose their ability to find and catch their own food. They can also become aggressive toward people, assuming that all people have food for them. If you see an animal that appears underfed, sick or in need of rescue, report it immediately to a watershed staff person. They can ensure that the situation is handled professionally, safely and in the best interest of the animal and you.



Robert Potts, California Academy of Sciences

**Raccoon**  
*Procyon lotor*



Jean Douglas

**California Ground Squirrel**  
*Otospermophilus beecheyi*

## Los Vaqueros Mammals



David Harper

**Bobcat**  
*Lynx rufus*



Jean Douglas

**Desert Cottontail**  
*Sylvilagus audubonii*



David Harper

**Coyote**  
*Canis latrans*

# Guide to Wildflowers

## Viewing Wildflowers

Nothing heralds the arrival of spring in the East Bay like the first appearance of a hillside wildflower bloom. From the deep blues and purples of lupines and irises to the rich brilliance of golden poppies, California wildflowers can dazzle and inspire even the most casual of spectators.

The Los Vaqueros Reservoir is a wonderful place to begin a lifetime pursuit of enjoying and understanding the beauty and mystery of our local wildflowers. Early spring (March to early May) is the best time of year to see wildflowers at the reservoir. During a typical spring, you can expect to find a variety of beautiful blossoms scattered across the emerald green hillsides, thanks to

## Common Los Vaqueros Wildflowers



William R. Hewlett, California Academy of Sciences

**Yellow Sticky Monkeyflower**



Brother Alfred Brousseau, St. Mary's College

**Mariposa Lily**

winter rains. The Cañada Trail in the southern watershed is an excellent, moderately difficult trail for wildflower viewing. For easier hiking with a good display of wildflowers, try the Kellogg Creek Trail and Interpretive Trail, both of which start at the Dam Staging Area in the northern watershed.

## Why Do Plants Have Flowers?

Although it is tempting to believe that flowers exist for our delight, their real job is to produce seeds, thus enabling plants to reproduce. Before a seed can be made, a flower must be pollinated. This happens when pollen from the stamen (the male reproductive organ) is transferred to the pistil (the female reproductive organ) of the same or different plant.

### Common Los Vaqueros Wildflowers



Brother Alfred Brousseau, St. Mary's College

Purple Vetch



Brother Alfred Brousseau, St. Mary's College

Lupine *(can be blue, white or yellow)*

Oak trees and many grasses use the wind to scatter their pollen, while other plants use animals and insects to accomplish the same feat. Flowers have evolved many “lures” to entice bees, flies, butterflies, moths, beetles, hummingbirds, and even bats to this all important job of reproduction. These pollinator lures are the beautiful designs, colors, and scents we get to enjoy each spring.

## Watching Pollinators

The relationship between plants and their pollinators is complex. Scientists are still unraveling many aspects of the puzzle. But for the amateur naturalist, just catching a glimpse of an Anna’s hummingbird sipping nectar from an owl’s clover, or a bumblebee alighting on a Mariposa lily is a joy to remember.



Brother Alfred Brousseau, St. Mary's College

**California Poppy**



Brother Alfred Brousseau, St. Mary's College

**Buttercup**

## Common Los Vaqueros Wildflowers



Brother Alfred Brousseau, St. Mary's College

**Wally Baskets**



Robert Potts, California Academy of Sciences

**Scarlet Pimpernel**

## Remember:

There is no collecting of any kind at the reservoir. Please leave wildflowers where you find them so that next year's wildflower display will be as beautiful as the last.



Brother Alfred Brousseau, St. Mary's College

**Owl's Clover**



## How to Reach Us

**Marina and Group Picnic Reservations**  
925-371-2628

**Urgent After-Hours Calls**  
925-688-8374

**Los Vaqueros Watershed Office**  
925-240-2360

**John Muir Interpretive Center**  
925-240-2440  
(weekends only)

**Water Education Program**  
925-688-8307

**Contra Costa Water District**  
925-688-8000



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