

BIRDWATCHER'S GUIDE TO REDWOOD FORESTS



MORE THAN 60 BIRDS IN THE COAST REDWOOD
AND GIANT SEQUOIA FORESTS

Save The Redwoods

L E A G U E



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Save The Redwoods

L E A G U E

STAND
 FOR THE **FUTURE**

Photos, front cover, background: Max Forster. Birds, clockwise from top left: dfaulder, Andrew D. Reding, Flickr Creative Commons; Alan Schmierer, Tom Koerner, USFWS.

Table of contents, clockwise from top left: Max Forster; Tom Benson, Mick Thompson, docentjoyce, Flickr Creative Commons.



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INTRODUCTION

Redwood forests are more than iconic cathedral-like groves. They support a dense web of interconnected species, from fungi to black bears. They are dynamic and evolving—and never more so than today, when Save the Redwoods League and its allies are restoring large portions of the forests that have been affected by logging and development.

In addition to the birds in ancient groves of coast redwoods and giant sequoia of the western Sierra Nevada, select birds of associated habitats—redwood and oak forests, woodlands along streams, and beaches and rocky shores—are also introduced in this guide.

Birdwatching, or birding, is an effective and highly enjoyable way to investigate the nuances and connections of the redwood forests. Birds are both drivers and beneficiaries of the League's work; our projects have protected multiple imperiled species, particularly those associated with ancient redwoods, including spotted owls and marbled murrelets. This guide provides information on where to go, what to look for, and how to prepare.

Birding is one of America's most popular outdoor pastimes and provides hours of enjoyment with minimal investment. No matter whether you're a beginner or an expert, it's thrilling to see unfamiliar and familiar birds. And as any seasoned birder knows, there are few places better suited for viewing and appreciating birds than the varied and beautiful landscapes of the Golden State's redwood parks.



Scott Ableman, Flickr Creative Commons

PREPARATION

The gear recommended for birding is minimal: comfortable shoes, a good pair of binoculars, a birding guide such as this one or one in the form of a book or smartphone application, appropriate clothing for the season, a hat and sunscreen, lunch, water, and perhaps a notebook. If you're a photography buff, you'll want to bring the appropriate cameras and lenses. Smartphone applications and websites such as **All About Birds** feature bird calls that can help you identify birds. Marine and water birds usually can be observed throughout the day, but many woodland birds are crepuscular: They're most active at dawn and sunset. Through your guide, familiarize yourself with the types of birds you're likely to see in the habitat you intend to explore. But know that many of these birds can be seen in several habitat types.

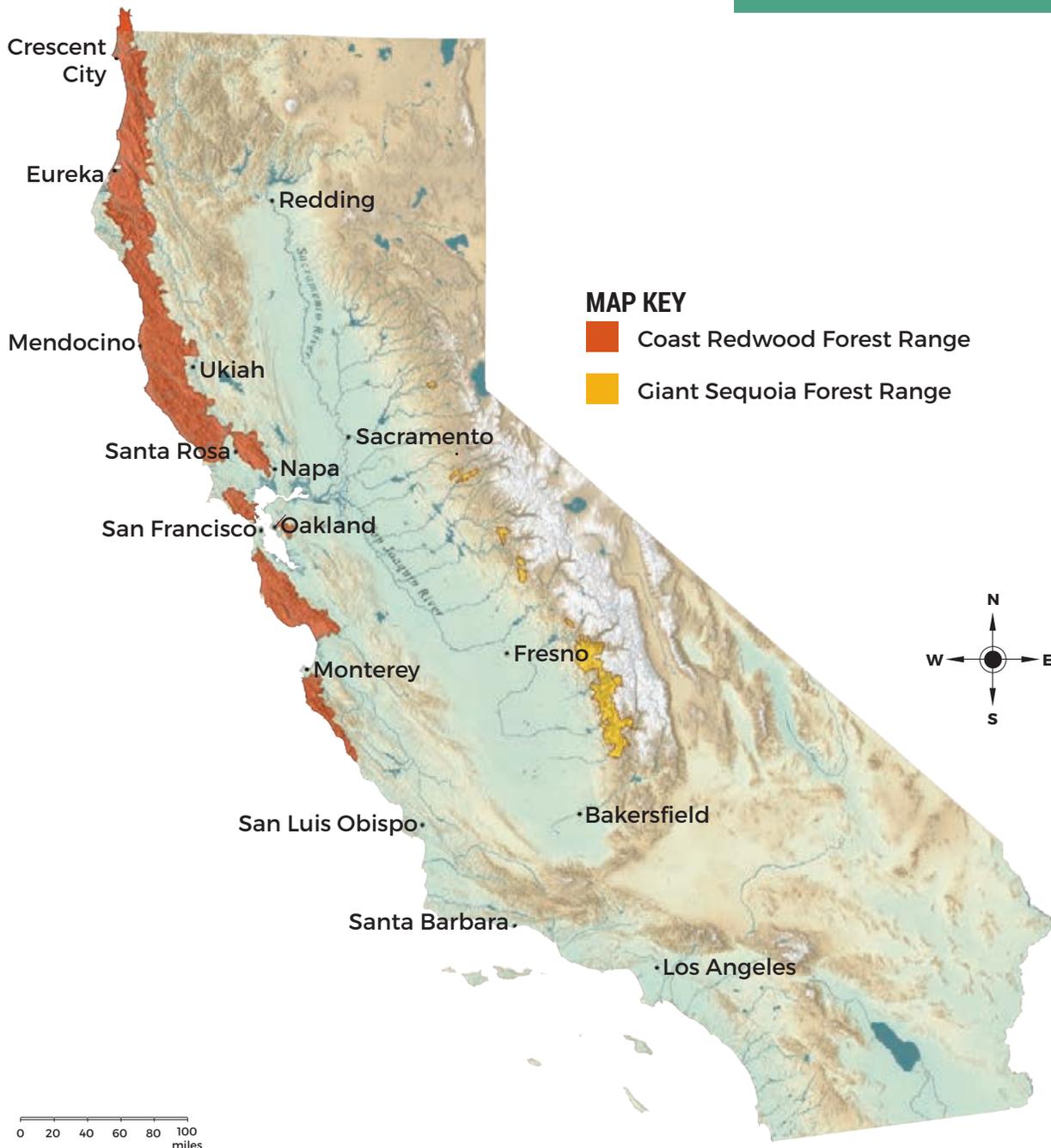
Walk slowly, and stop often. Listen. Look. Speak softly. Birds, after all, are wildlife, and wildlife is reflexively reclusive and retiring. To observe birds, you must become part of the wild.

THE HABITATS

COAST REDWOOD AND GIANT SEQUOIA RANGES

FIND A PARK

Locate more than 100 coast redwood and giant sequoia parks by using the League's free trip-planning tool at [ExploreRedwoods.org](https://www.explore-redwoods.org).



Learn more at [SaveTheRedwoods.org](https://www.savetheredwoods.org)



Marilyn M. Flickr Creative Commons.

FIND A PARK
Locate ancient redwood parks by using the League’s free trip-planning tool at [ExploreRedwoods.org](https://www.exploreRedwoods.org). Filter results by clicking on “Ancient Redwoods.”

The ancient coast redwoods of Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park.

ANCIENT COAST REDWOOD FORESTS

FEATURED PARKS

REDWOOD NATIONAL AND STATE PARKS

Located 325 miles north of San Francisco, Redwood National and State Parks are a UNESCO World Heritage site including Redwood National Park, as well as Prairie Creek Redwoods, Del Norte Coast Redwoods, and Jedediah Smith Redwoods state parks. The parks include four of the habitats in this guide: ancient redwood groves; redwood and oak forests; woodlands along streams; and beaches and rocky shores. The list of resident and migratory birds is correspondingly long. Many rare species have been sighted here, including great gray owls. As the seasons change and as impacted lands within the parks are restored, bird species and numbers fluctuate and shift. For a birder, it is a never-ending and constantly changing story that can be enjoyed over a lifetime.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF AMAZING PARKS WITH ANCIENT REDWOOD FORESTS

- Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Preserve
- Big Basin Redwoods State Park
- Hendy Woods State Park

Birding in the ancient redwoods can be challenging. First, birds are relatively few in number when compared to many more open habitats. Second, many of the species frequent the lofty branches and foliage of the great trees, and they can be difficult to spot from the ground. Binoculars are essential. But even more important is a familiarity with the calls of the birds you're likely to hear. This guide describes calls, but for more help, try smartphone applications and websites such as [**All About Birds**](#), which feature recordings of songs and sounds.

The following birds commonly inhabit old-growth redwood forests.





Alan Schmiere. USFWS

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD

Large as hummingbirds go, the jewel-like Anna's hummingbird is widespread and common in all the habitats mentioned throughout this guide, other than rocky shores. The birds are mostly iridescent green; red feathers cover the male's head and throat. Females and immature birds have gray bellies and bits of red on the throat. The call is a high, sharp *tzip, tzip, tzip*. Air passing over the male's tail makes a squeak at the bottom of a courtship dive.



Kelly Colgan Azar. Flickr Creative Commons

BROWN CREEPER

As its name implies, this bird creeps in a spiral pattern up tree trunks, especially large, mature ones, prospecting for insects with its curved bill. Its feathers are a subdued pattern of brown, white, and black along the back, and dull white along the breast and belly. The call is a varying series of high notes, sometimes sounding as if it's saying *trees, beautiful trees*.



Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren, Wikimedia Commons

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET

This is an extremely small bird with an olive-green dorsal surface, a paler olive-green breast and belly, and two whitish wing bars. Its size and reclusiveness can make it extremely difficult to spot in an old-growth forest. Its call is typically a rising *ti-ti-ti* followed by chattering.



John Boyle, Flickr Creative Commons

NORTHERN GOSHAWK

This is a fierce raptor with a long tail and short, rounded wings designed for quick maneuvering around trees. Adults have dark gray crowns and white eyebrows. They are blue-gray on the back, with paler belly and breast feathers that are barred with dark gray. Juveniles are brown on the dorsal areas, with streaked plumage on the belly and breast. The call is a loud and strident *kak-kak-kak-kak-kak-kak-kak-kak-kak-kak*.



Alan Harper, Flickr Creative Commons

PACIFIC-SLOPE FLYCATCHER

Also known as the western flycatcher, this small songbird has an olive-brown back, a yellow throat and belly, a dull olive breast, white eye rings, and pale wing bars. The lower mandible of its bill is bright yellow. Call: a rising *pseet-ptsick-seet*.



Peter Pearsall, USFWS

PACIFIC WREN

The rapid, high notes of this tiny brown bird are among the most commonly heard in old-growth evergreen forests. Look for it hopping and creeping on logs. It often holds up its stubby tail.



Mark Moschell, Flickr Creative Commons

PILEATED WOODPECKER

This crow-sized woodpecker can be mistaken for no other bird. Black with a dramatic red crest, white wing linings, and white neck stripes, its staccato, hammer-like pecking can usually be heard from considerable distances. Its highly distinctive call consists of a *cuk-cuk-cuk-cuk-cuk* that rises and falls in pitch.



Peter Pearsall, USFWS

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD

Throughout California, look for the rufous hummingbird as it migrates in the spring. Males are a vivid rusty color on the back and belly, with a red throat. Females and immature birds have greenish gray heads and backs and rusty sides. The call is a fast series of *chip* notes.



Becky Matsubara, Flickr Creative Commons

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER

These small birds have dark ear and eye masks surrounded by yellow, wings with two white bars, and streaked flanks. Listen for a high-pitched swee swee swee zee.



Peter Pearsall, USFWS

VARIED THRUSH

A handsome, large thrush, it has slate-gray upper parts, and an orange throat and breast marked by a broad dark gray or black bar. The female is similarly marked, but paler. Its call is a *churr*.



Alan Schmierer, Flickr Creative Commons

VAUX'S SWIFT

The Vaux's swift is a little, long-winged bird that spends much of its time in aerial acrobatics. In an ancient forest, it is typically briefly spotted in silhouette against the sky as it soars between the trees, gulping flying insects. It clings to vertical surfaces, so it may occasionally be spotted on redwood trunks. Its plumage is brown, lightening slightly in tone on the belly, breast and the throat. The call is a high, rapid twitter.



David Brenzinski, USFWS

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

This small, short-tailed bird looks as if it lacks a neck. Watch for it as it creeps down trunks foraging for insects and seeds. You'll also know it by its white face and breast, its gray-blue back, and its endearing, nasal *wha-wha-wha* call.



Hamer Environmental LP, USFWS

MARbled MURRELET

If there is a single bird that is emblematic of the ancient redwood forest, it is the marbled murrelet. These stocky seabirds related to puffins and auklets are highly dependent on mature forests. They require the horizontal limbs of old-growth coastal conifers for their nesting sites, and their populations consequently have plummeted due to logging. (Marine oil spills also diminished their numbers.) Their decline has been particularly pronounced in the southern end of their range—the redwood, Douglas-fir and Engelmann spruce forests of California. Marbled murrelets are listed as threatened under the US Endangered Species Act and as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

And yet, marbled murrelets—or “fog larks” as loggers once called them—still nest in the ancient groves protected by California’s redwood parks and preserves, and the lucky birder may well spot one with patience and luck. Look for a compact, plump seabird with a short pointed bill and a short tail. Breeding adults are solid dusky brown on their dorsal surfaces, and mottled brown on their bellies and breasts. Non-breeding adults are dark gray to black on their upper portions, white on the belly and breasts, and white on the sides of the head, extending most of the way around the nape of the neck.

Their typical call is a two-syllable *ke-er*.



Frank D. Lospalluto, Flickr Creative Commons

SPOTTED OWL

The spotted owl is exquisitely adapted for old-growth forests. They need large forests with dense canopies, as well as varied vegetation in which to hunt woodrats and flying squirrels. Spotted owls also nest in tree cavities, and they are hesitant to cross clear-cuts or other disturbed areas.

These biological requirements led to its listing under the US Endangered Species Act, changing logging practices across much of the Pacific Northwest and California, and causing fierce political debates. This beleaguered owl continues to decline despite ongoing efforts to protect it; current threats include habitat fragmentation and the intrusion of the barred owl, a related species that is larger, more aggressive, and more adaptable.

Despite its ongoing difficulties, the spotted owl serves as a cultural touchstone for advocates of the redwood forests. Identifying one in the wild is a goal of any veteran birder. Spotted owls are dark brown with white spots on the head and back; the breast has white horizontal bars. They have round heads, brown facial disks, and pale markings that form an “X” between the eyes. (Barred owls, which look similar, are somewhat larger and have dark vertical streaks on the belly plumage.)

Spotted owls are capable of a wide range of vocalizations, including hoots and whistles.



H. Grimes, Flickr Creative Commons

FIND A PARK
Locate coast redwood parks by using the League's free trip-planning tool at [ExploreRedwoods.org](https://www.explore-redwoods.org).

Oaks in Dr. Aurelia Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park in Oakland.

REDWOOD AND OAK FORESTS

FEATURED PARKS

DR. AURELIA REINHARDT REDWOOD REGIONAL AND ROBERTS REGIONAL PARKS

These East Bay parks are close to some of California's most densely populated urban areas. But despite their proximity to San Francisco Bay Area cities, they encompass a variety of habitats and are rich in wildlife, including birds. A short drive from San Francisco or Oakland will take visitors deep into lush, young redwood forests and oak woodlands, or across rolling grasslands spangled with wildflowers. Good bird sightings are virtually assured for any trip.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF BEAUTIFUL PARKS WITH REDWOOD AND OAK FORESTS

- Austin Creek State Recreation Area
- Pescadero Creek County Park Complex

The areas where redwood stands mix with oak woodlands can be rich in bird diversity because they contain different communities of plants and animals. Oaks often contain cavities that many species utilize, and acorns are a dietary staple for a wide variety of birds.

Commonly observed birds of these habitats include the following.





Mick Thompson, Flickr Creative Commons

ACORN WOODPECKER

The signs of this colony-nesting woodpecker are often seen before the birds themselves: trees with holes containing acorns. These acorn “granaries” sustain the raucous, highly sociable woodpeckers throughout the winter. These are distinctly marked birds: a bright scarlet crown; a black back, neck, wings, and tail; a yellowish-white throat; and an off-white breast and flanks. Their call is a robust *wake-up, wake-up*.



Gary Kramer, USFWS

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER

This is a large bird with a gray back and head, a pale yellow belly, a whitish throat and wing bars, and a long, rufous-colored tail. It's typically seen perched, scanning for flying insects. Calls can vary from an extended *prrrt* to a sharp, high-pitched *ka-dick*.



Gary Kramer, USFWS

BAND-TAILED PIGEON

California's only native pigeon is larger and far wavier than domesticated rock doves — the “city pigeon” familiar to any urbanite. The band-tailed pigeon is dark gray on its upper parts and pale gray on its breast. It also has a wide, pale band on its tail. Listen for the male's coo.



Bill Thompson, USFWS

CEDAR WAXWING

The cedar waxwing is a thrill to spot because of its futuristic black eye mask, crest, yellow belly and tail tips, and sometimes bright red wing tips that give it its name. Look for large groups of them eating berries in the fall and winter. Listen for their high-pitched whistle.



Doug Greenberg, Flickr Creative Commons

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE

This beautiful little bird favors the lush coniferous forests of the coast and woodlands along streams. It has a black cap and throat, white cheeks, and a rich, chestnut-colored back and flanks. Listen for its high, scratchy *chick-a-dee*.



Matt "Smooth Tooth" Knoth, Flickr Creative Commons

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER

This dramatically marked warbler favors brushy openings in coniferous forests and mixed woodlands. With a black-and-white striped head and flanks, a white breast, a black-striped gray back, and white wing bars, it possesses good camouflage. It also has a yellow spot in front of the eye. Its vocalizations consist of a rising and falling *zee zee zee zee bzz bzz* or a subdued *tup*.



Dave Menke, USFWS

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK

Like all grosbeaks, this bird has a large bill. The male has a rich russet breast, a yellow belly, and a black head; the wings and tail are black with bold white patches and spots. The female has a white eyebrow, brown, streaked upperparts, and buff underparts. Their song is a lovely, sweet, relatively rapid warble; they also employ a call note, a short *tick*.



Andrew Reding, Flickr Creative Commons

COOPER'S HAWK

This handsome hawk is often seen perching on branches or saplings on the forest's edge, hunting for other birds. The adult has a white and rust-colored breast, blue-gray upperparts, a black cap, red eyes, and a striped tail. Cooper's hawks typically are silent except during the breeding season, when they vocalize with sharp *cack-cack-cacks*.



Becky Matsubara, Flickr Creative Commons

HUTTON'S VIREO

Oak woodlands are good places to find this small, retiring vireo. It is gray-olive, with white eye rings and two white wing bars. They vocalize in loud, abbreviated chattering, typically a slurred *chu-whe*, *chu-wee*, or *che-eer*, *che-eer*; they also emit sharp *chit-chit* calls.



Andrew Reding, Flickr Creative Commons

NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER

This black-and-white striped woodpecker is a common sight in oak woodlands, circling around tree branches. The male has a red patch on the back of its head. The call is a metallic rattle.



Becky Matsubara, Flickr Creative Commons

OAK TITMOUSE

A small, gray, crested bird, the oak titmouse is found in groves of the trees associated with its name. Typically heard more often than seen, they keep to the thick foliage of the canopy, where they flit about vigorously in search of food. They have a variety of rapid, high and low calls.



Alan McDonley, Flickr Creative Commons

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER

One of the larger flycatchers, this big-billed insectivorous bird typically favors coniferous forests and is usually seen perched in the open on dead branches or at the very tops of trees – the better to spot its winged prey. It's dark gray overall with a white patch running down the center of its breast. Listen for its sharp *quick-three-beers* or a strong *pip-pip-pip*.



Linda Tanner, Flickr Creative Commons

STELLER'S JAY

Bold and blue, this large crested jay is often seen singly or in small flocks throughout coastal forests. The dark blue plumage is shaded with black or black-brown on the head, neck, and lower back. Its call is varied and loud, often *shook shook shook shook*.



Jerry Kirkhart, Flickr Creative Commons

WESTERN BLUEBIRD

The western bluebird is often seen fluttering from perch to perch in varied woodlands. The male has a striking, deep blue hood and wings, and a rusty vest; the female and immature birds are gray with blue-tinted wings. The call is a soft *few*.



Bryant Olsen, Flickr Creative Commons

WESTERN SCREECH OWL

This small, cryptic owl has small ear tufts, gray or brown patterned plumage, and yellow eyes. Heard from dusk and into the night, the call is a series of high, sharp notes, accelerating at the end like a bouncing ball.



USFWS Pacific Southwest Region. Flickr Creative Commons

WESTERN TANAGER

The male of this species is one of our most beautiful songbirds, displaying an orange-red head, a bright yellow breast and belly, and black wings with white wing bars. The female is also lovely, though more subdued in coloration, with a yellow belly and breast and gray-black dorsal plumage. The song is a series of high and low notes, sounding like quick questions.



Francesco Veronesi, Flickr Creative Commons

WESTERN WOOD PEEWEE

This gray flycatcher is often seen in the summer flying back and forth from branches to catch insects. It has two white wing bars, a dark bill, and a whitish belly. Its song is a nasal version of *pee-wee*.

SPRING AND FALL MIGRATIONS

From rufous hummingbirds to Brant geese, a great many birds migrate along the Pacific Flyway during the spring and fall migrations. Typically, birds in North America fly south for food and milder weather during the fall, and north to breed in the spring. During these periods, birding is at its best, providing the most sightings in both the numbers of species and individual birds.

Each habitat supports its group of birds during each migratory period, with the variety and numbers fluctuating constantly. In mixed woodlands, you may see groups of cedar waxwings gorging on berries during one visit, then large flocks of band-tailed pigeons exploiting the same food resource a week later. Varied thrushes may throng an old-growth grove of redwoods for a month, then abruptly disappear.

Tens of thousands of birds of prey also funnel along the California coast during the fall migration. Spring provides opportunities for witnessing breeding and nesting behavior among the many species of resident and migratory songbirds that utilize the woodlands of our redwood parks.

Birding is a rewarding endeavor at any time of the year in the redwood parks, but the migrations are special. Regular visits to the parks during these periods build a deep sense of the abiding rhythms of the natural realm. The migrations give the birder an intimate and textured sense of the world from the bird's point of view. They help us understand the resilience and strength of these remarkably beautiful creatures, force us to confront the threats they face, and encourage us to think about ways to better accommodate their needs.



FIND A PARK

Locate coast redwood parks by using the League's free trip-planning tool at [ExploreRedwoods.org](https://www.exploreRedwoods.org).

Navarro River Redwoods State Park

WOODLANDS ALONG STREAMS

FEATURED PARKS

NAVARRO RIVER REDWOODS STATE PARK

This state park encompasses an 11-mile run of the Navarro River in Mendocino County, protecting both woodland and coastal habitat. Accessible by canoe and kayak, this remote and tranquil river park provides superb birding for a variety of wading birds, waterfowl, and songbirds. The beach at the river's mouth is also intensively foraged by multiple shorebird species.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF REDWOOD PARKS WITH AWESOME RIVERS

- Humboldt Redwoods State Park
- Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park
- Mendocino Headlands State Park

Many of California's coast redwood parks are drained by rivers and streams, and these corridors constitute distinct ecosystems in their own right. The alders, willows, cottonwoods, and shoreline conifers along major rivers and their tributaries support completely different suites of birds than coniferous and hardwood forests set well back from the water. Further, the water itself is an exceptionally rich avian habitat, sustaining a wide range of wading birds, waterfowl, and shorebirds.

In these habitats, walk slowly near the water, stopping often, and looking and listening intently. An alternative is to observe from a canoe, kayak, or raft. Never boat on a river without knowing its character, don't attempt to negotiate moving water that is above your level of competence, and always wear a personal flotation device.

Birds found in and around rivers include the following.





John Magera, USFWS

BLACK PHOEBE

This handsome flycatcher has a black head, back, wings, and tail, and a white belly. It's usually seen hunting flying insects from low perches near water. Its call is a short, sharp *tsip*.



Mick Thompson, Flickr Creative Commons

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT

Look and listen for this large woodland warbler in thickets. It has a long tail, a heavy bill, a bright yellow breast, and a white belly. Its back is olive-green, and it has white spectacle-like markings around its eyes. Its vocalizations are a series of whistles, croaks, and caws.



babyruthinmind, Flickr Creative Commons

OSPREY

A sighting of the large, powerful raptor of the rivers and coasts is always a treat for birders. It has brown dorsal plumage, a white belly, breast, and head, and dark lines transecting its eyes and along the sides of the face. Ospreys are often seen flying above large rivers scanning for fish, or in the spring, nesting atop streamside snags. An osprey snagging a large fish is a sight that will forge a lifetime memory. Voice: loud, high-pitched whistles.



Stan Lupo, Flickr Creative Commons

YELLOW WARBLER

A lovely, bright yellow bird with a sweet voice, the yellow warbler favors moist thickets. It has a light greenish sheen on its back, and the male has russet streaks on its breast. Look for them at the tops of small trees. Its song is *sweet, sweet, sweet, I'm so sweet*, and it also calls *chip*.



Peter Pearsall, USFWS

WILSON'S WARBLER

A beautiful songbird of thickets near streams, this little warbler has a bright yellow throat, breast, and belly, and an olive back and wings. The male has a black cap. The song is sharp, high, and rapid: *chi-chi-chi-chet-chet*. The call is a high *chip*.



Steve Hillebrand, USFWS

GREAT BLUE HERON

A large, tall wading bird of freshwater and saltwater habitats, the great blue heron is gray-blue with a long, dagger-like yellow bill. Great blue herons are both adaptable and opportunistic, feeding on a wide variety of prey, including fish, rodents, frogs, snakes, and small birds. Its voice is a loud, harsh *squawk*.



Michael Levine-Clark, Flickr Creative Commons

COMMON MERGANSER

This large duck is common on rivers, where it typically fishes in flocks. The male has a brilliant white breast and flanks, a green head, and a red bill. The female has gray plumage, a crested red-brown head, and a white throat. Their call is a series of low, harsh croaks.



Tom Benson, Flickr Creative Commons

AMERICAN DIPPER

Any devoted trout angler is familiar with the American dipper, also known as the “water ouzel.” Roughly the size of a robin and with the body shape of a wren, it is gray and has a short tail.

If the dipper’s appearance isn’t particularly dramatic, its foraging habits are. It is always found near clean, fast water—typically smaller streams, but some large whitewater rivers as well. Its feeding behavior consists of diving into a river and snagging aquatic insects and larvae while swimming and running along the bottom with wings partially open for stability. Their presence is also a good indicator of water quality; American dippers need abundant insects and larvae to survive, and aquatic insects require clean water.

Dippers nest among the roots of streamside trees or in rock crevices near water. Their vocalizations, a cascading melody of notes or a *zeet* is usually loud enough to be heard over the whitewater.



David Baron, Flickr Creative Commons

FIND A PARK

Locate coast redwood parks with beaches by using the League's free trip-planning tool at [ExploreRedwoods.org](https://www.exploreRedwoods.org). Filter results by selecting "Beaches."

Wilder Ranch State Park

BEACHES AND ROCKY SHORES

FEATURED PARKS

WILDER RANCH STATE PARK

Just north of Santa Cruz, Wilder Ranch State Park offers a redwood grove and historic buildings. It's also known for its dramatic bluffs, sea caves, tide pools, and a beach along a coast rich in wildlife. Look for common murre nesting on the cliffs, brown pelicans diving for fish, seals hauled out on the rocks, and sea otters foraging near shore.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF REDWOOD PARKS WITH BEACHES AND ROCKY SHORES

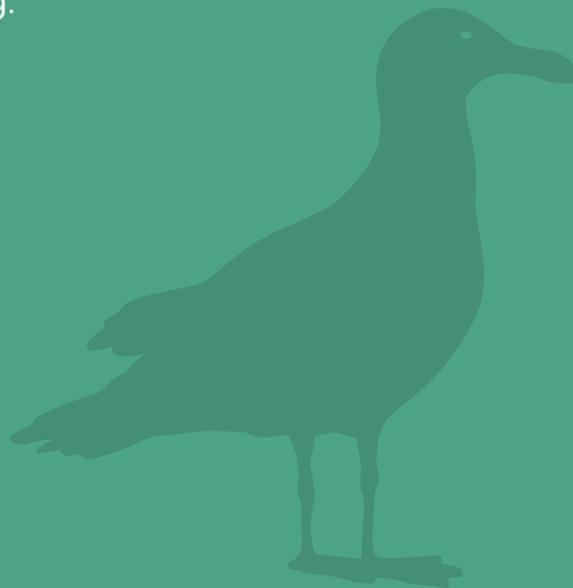
- Andrew Molera State Park
- Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park
- Sinkyone Wilderness State Park

Many of the state's redwood parks are located on the Pacific Ocean coast, and the marine environment that forms their western boundaries is exceedingly rich in birds. A variety of local, state, and federal ordinances and initiatives have maintained the North Coast in a relatively pristine state. The offshore waters are replete with fish and marine mammals, and the intertidal zone is rich in invertebrate life. Given both the good condition of the natural habitat and the plentiful food supply, it's no coincidence that birds abound. The species and numbers vary with the season and the locale. Many shorebirds, for example, are migratory and often are most abundant during the fall migration.

The coastal redwood parks can offer birding in the ancient redwood groves, in mixed oak forests, and along rivers, beaches and headlands. Each habitat is distinct, and each will support its own complex of signature bird species.

In any event, exercise care and be sure of your footing when birding along the rocky shore. Most critically, keep an eye on the water. The North Coast is notorious for its heavy surf, and sleeper waves can overwhelm the inattentive and unprepared.

Coastal birds of the redwood parks include the following.





Lisa Hupp, USFWS

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER

Unlike most other shorebirds, the black oystercatcher favors rocky beaches. With its stocky body, black plumage, and long red bill, it's a highly distinctive bird. Call: a whistling *wheee-whee-whee-whee*.



Jason Crotty, Flickr Creative Commons

BLACK TURNSTONE

A short-legged shorebird of rocks and beaches, the black turnstone seeks food by using its short bill to turn over stones and other items. It's dark blackish-brown overall with a white belly. One of the calls is a rattle.



Mick Thompson, Flickr Creative Commons

BROWN PELICAN

Brown pelicans were once highly endangered due to the widespread use of the pesticide DDT, which adversely affected their reproduction. With pesticide regulation, they are now a familiar sight, gliding single file low across the water, occasionally diving for fish. Brown pelicans are large birds with brown bodies and long bills. Adults have light yellow heads; juveniles have brown heads. They seldom vocalize, issuing only occasional low grunts during the nesting season.



Jan Arendtsz. Flickr Creative Commons

BRANDT'S CORMORANT

Similar in appearance to the closely related double-crested cormorant, with which they share a range, coastal habitat, and a fish diet, Brandt's cormorants are large at 3 feet long. They have black plumage, large heads, and stout necks. Breeding birds sport a bright blue chin patch and delicate white plumes on the face and along the back. They grunt and croak only on the nest.



Eric Ellingson, Flickr Creative Commons

COMMON MURRE

During breeding season, this seabird looks like a penguin: It has a black head, back, and wings, and a white belly and breast. While nesting in colonies on cliffs and rocks, its call is a throaty *urr*. Following the post-breeding molt, it has a white throat, chin, and cheek.



Becky Matsubara, Flickr Creative Commons

LEAST SANDPIPER

This is the world's smallest sandpiper at about 6 inches long. Look for them in mudflats and marshes during spring and fall migrations. The back is a mottled brown, and the underparts are white with dark streaks on the throat. The legs are yellow. Its call is a high *kree-eeep*.



Doug Greenberg, Flickr Creative Commons

MARbled GODWIT

This shorebird is usually seen hunting aquatic invertebrates, probing the sand with its long upturned pink-and-black bill. Marbled godwits have long legs and mottled brown dorsal plumage. The call is like a nasal laugh.



Andrew Reding, Flickr Creative Commons

PELAGIC CORMORANT

This slender seabird is smaller than double-crested and Brandt's cormorants, and has a long neck and black, iridescent plumage. The breeding adult has white flank patches and a red face and throat. Look for it diving for fish. They are silent except when breeding, when males groan and females croak.



Becky Matsubara, Flickr Creative Commons

PIGEON GUILLEMOT

This seabird is black except for its white wing patches. During breeding season, its legs and feet are bright red. Look for it diving for fish near rocky shores, and listen for high whistles.



Peter Pearsall, USFWS

SANDERLING

Sanderlings are small pale shorebirds that scurry on wet sandy beaches, probing for crabs and worms as the waves recede. They are light gray and white and have short bills and black legs. Their call is a soft, squeaky *wick wick*.



Docentjoyce, Flickr Creative Commons

WESTERN GULL

This large gull stays close to the sea, unlike the California gull. It has dark gray back plumage and wings; yellow eyes; a white head, neck and underparts; a red spot on the lower bill; and pink legs. Its diet ranges from fish to fast food scraps. Its call is a loud *keow*.



Peter Pearsall, USFWS

WESTERN SANDPIPER

During spring migration, these compact little birds often are seen in large flocks feeding on tidal flats and beaches. The back is a mottled gray and brown, and the underparts are white with a lightly streaked breast. The call is a high *cheep*.



Keenan Adams, USFWS

WILLET

This relatively large shorebird forages along beaches and tidal flats for worms, crabs, and other invertebrates. It is grayish overall with a long, dark bill and long legs. In flight, its black-and-white wings are distinctive. The call, a loud, high *pill-will-willet*, evokes its name.



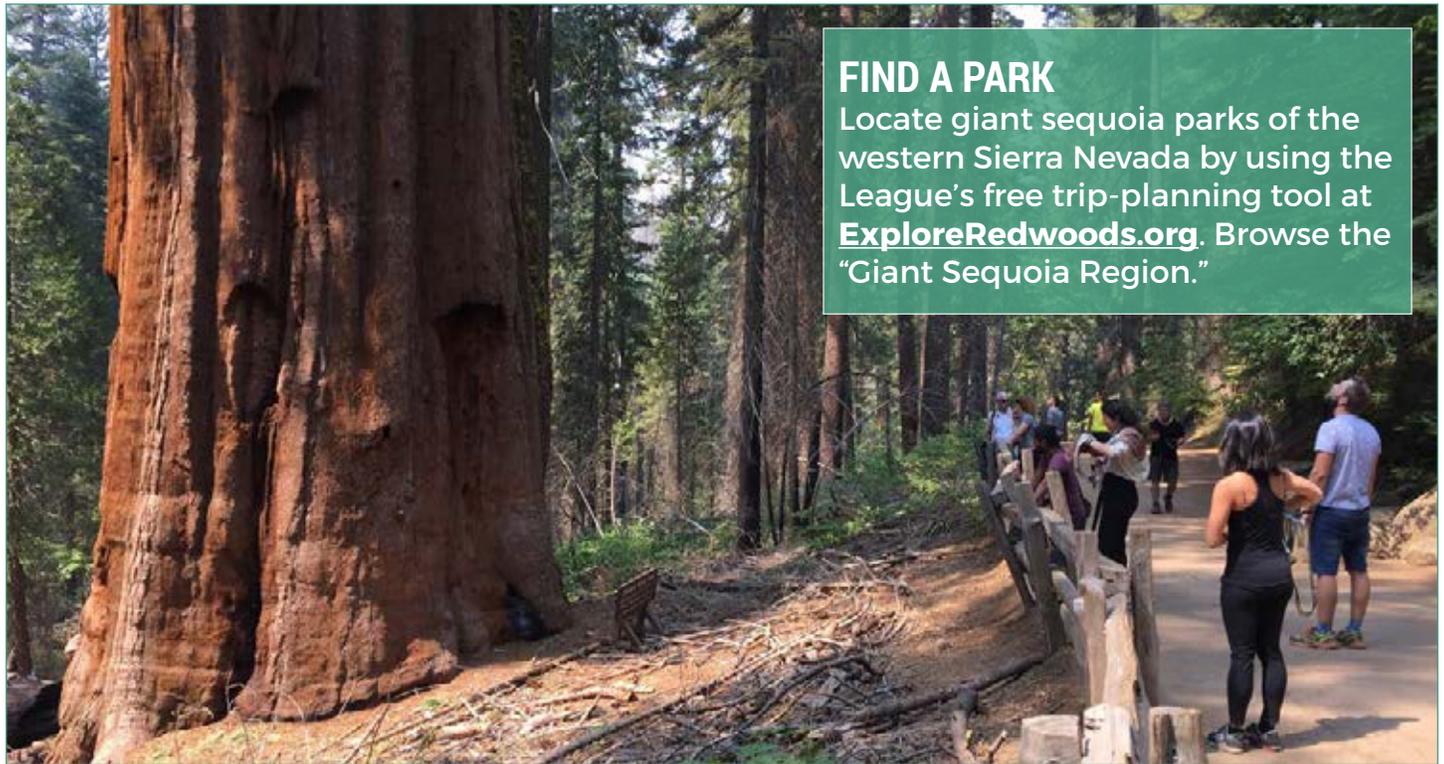
Kristine Sowl, USFWS

BRANT

Brant are related to Canada geese. Brant are smaller, with shorter necks and white collars instead of white cheeks. Their heads and necks are black, and they have pale flanks, white rumps, and dark gray or black dorsal plumage. Their call is a low *honk*.

Brant inhabit both the West and East Coasts and nest in the Arctic. In California, they are a winter denizen. A long group of Brant flying just above the gray, turbulent sea is a dramatic sight, and one that will make any birding foray a memorable event.

Brant typically subsist on eelgrass, which grows on coastal mudflats. But prime eelgrass habitat in California is declining due to coastal development, dredging, and pollution.



FIND A PARK

Locate giant sequoia parks of the western Sierra Nevada by using the League's free trip-planning tool at [ExploreRedwoods.org](https://www.exploreRedwoods.org). Browse the "Giant Sequoia Region."

Tuolumne Grove of Giant Sequoia in Yosemite National Park.

Ben Churchill, Flickr Creative Commons

WESTERN SIERRA NEVADA

FEATURED PARKS

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Long celebrated for its stunning valley and soaring granite walls, Yosemite National Park is also a vast wilderness, sheltering all varieties of Sierra wildlife. Its giant sequoia groves support a variety of birds not found in coast redwood forests, including white-headed woodpeckers and pine grosbeaks.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF SPECTACULAR GIANT SEQUOIA PARKS

- Calaveras Big Trees State Park
- Mountain Home Demonstration State Forest
- Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

The western slopes of the Sierra Nevada are home ground for *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, the giant sequoia, the largest tree on the planet. There are 73 groves of these rare trees, nearly all of which are protected in public ownership. Efforts to preserve them are ongoing and include restoring their fire resilience as they face the increasing threat of severe wildfires.

These behemoth trees—and the associated forests that surround them—are also home to a wide assortment of fascinating birds. While some avian species are to be found in both coast redwood and giant sequoia forests, the giant sequoia also sustain a number of species that seldom, if ever, venture to the coast.

Some birds you can see in and around the giant sequoia groves include the following.





Eric Ellingson, Flickr Creative Commons

BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER

This large, relatively scarce woodpecker favors burned forests that provide wood-boring insects and shelter. It has black plumage on the back, a white facial stripe, and barred flanks. The male has a yellow crown patch. The call is a sharp *kik*.



Tom Benson, Flickr Creative Commons

CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD

A migrant, this small hummingbird can be spotted in forest meadows, areas near streams, and within open mid- to high-elevation forests during the summer. The green-vested male is particularly noteworthy for its beautiful magenta throat. Females and young birds have green backs and peachy underparts. The call is a soft *tick*.



Dave Menke, USFWS

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER

Guard your breakfast bacon if this handsome, bold jay is around: Its nickname is “camp robber.” Typically found in foothill and mountain areas, the Clark’s nutcracker has gray plumage with distinctive black-and-white wings. The call is a rough, extended *krah-ah-ah*.



Maggie Smith, Flickr Creative Commons

HERMIT WARBLER

A songbird of the mature western coniferous forests that's heard more often than seen, this warbler has a distinctive yellow face and white underparts. The male has a black throat. The dorsal plumage and wings are gray with two white wing bars. The call includes a series of high or buzzy notes.



Tom Koerner, USFWS

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

Like the western bluebird, the mountain bluebird favors mixed, relatively open woodlands, though it typically ranges at higher elevations. The male is an exquisite bright blue; the female is mostly gray and brown with blue-tinged wings and tail. The call is a soft *terr*.



Dave Menke USFWS

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE

This little bird favors coniferous forests of the West. It has a black cap, throat, and eye patch; a white cheek, eyebrow, and belly; and a gray back and flanks. Its call is a *chick-a-dee*, often repeating *dee*.



Mick Thompson, Flickr Creative Commons

NASHVILLE WARBLER

This attractive little warbler is found in mixed and second-growth (previously logged) forests. Plumage varies according to season: brighter in spring, duller in autumn. The throat, breast, and belly are yellow, and the back is gray-olive. The eye ring is white. It generally vocalizes a high two-part song followed a lower-pitched trill.



dfaulder, Flickr Creative Commons

PINE GROSBEAK

This large, big-billed finch inhabits coniferous forests throughout the Sierra Nevada. The male has dusty rose-red plumage, dark wings with double white wing bars, dark streaks on the back, and a long, dark, notched tail. The female has a golden head and chest, and gray flanks and wings. The call is a three-noted whistle.



Leslie Scopes Anderson, Flickr Creative Commons

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH

This tiny bird is most often seen creeping on tree trunks hunting for insects. Look for an elegant bird with a blue-gray back, a russet belly and breast, a black crown, and white eyebrows. The voice is a thin, high-pitched *yank-yank*.



Tom Benson, Flickr Creative Commons

WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER

The snowy white head on this woodpecker makes it easy to identify. Look for a relatively large, black woodpecker with a white head, throat, and wing patches. Males have a red patch on the back of the head. Look for it foraging for seeds on ponderosa and other pines. It is mostly silent but sometimes calls when near the nest: either a quick *pee-dink* or a longer *pee-dee-dee-dink*.



Max Forster

GREAT GRAY OWL

Candidly, your chances of spotting a great gray owl while visiting the giant sequoia groves are slim. But it's like winning the lottery: There is a chance. Yosemite National Park's great gray owl (*Strix nebulosa Yosemiteensis*) is genetically distinct from the great gray owl in western North America (*Strix nebulosa nebulosi*). Listed as a California State Endangered Species, there are only about 300 individuals in California, most of which are in Yosemite. Even a beginning birder would have difficulty confusing the great gray with any other owl. It's big and long, and its round, earless head, dramatic facial disks, and large, unwavering yellow eyes make it a distinctive bird. The owl is gray, with brown streaks and a white "bow tie."

The great gray owl is active day and night. In the Sierra Nevada, look for them on perches along meadow edges, where they often hunt for rodents. Perhaps the best way to see a great gray owl is to listen carefully. Their vocalization is a repetitive, booming *whoo*. Find the source of this distinctive call, and you have a good chance of spotting the owl.

HELP PROTECT REDWOODS FOREVER

Your contributions help Save the Redwoods League safeguard special places, allowing us to purchase redwood land, restore logged forests, study how to best protect them, and connect with people these magical expressions of life. With your help, we know that we can realize our vision: vibrant redwood forests of the scale and grandeur that once graced the California coast and the Sierra Nevada, protected forever, restored to grow old again, and connected with people through magnificent parks that inspire all of us with the beauty and power of nature.

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