

BONUS!
A CELEBRITY
INTERVIEW



“The Usual Suspects” in California’s Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta



WHITE-TAILED KITE



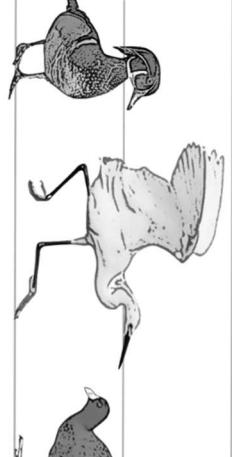
TREE SWALLOW



RED-WINGED
BLACKBIRD



WOOD DUCK



SNOWY EGRET



AMERICAN COOT



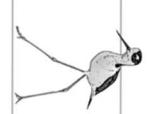
SANDHILL CRANE



GREAT EGRET



GREAT BLUE HERON



BLACK-NECKED
STILT

Two Great Places to Visit our Delta Birds

Cosumnes River Preserve

13501 Franklin Blvd. Galt, CA 95632

Visitor Center, accessible paths, kayak launch. The Cosumnes is California's last undammed river flowing down from the Sierra Nevada range. Come all year around to see the Delta's ebb and flow the way it used to be and to meet the birds who call Cosumnes home.



Cosumnes River Preserve

Woodbridge Ecological Reserve (Isenberg Sandhill Crane Reserve)

7730 West Woodbridge Road, Lodi, CA 95242

Two parking lots, on the north and south sides of Woodbridge Road, bathroom at the south-side parking lot. Best for waterbird-watching during the winter months.

If you don't have an active fishing or hunting license, please purchase a California Fish and Wildlife land pass to support the WER.

Docent-led Sandhill Crane tours are available on weekends October – February. The docent will give a presentation about the Cranes and guide visitors from the Woodbridge Road parking lots to a private viewing area with amenities. Sign up for a tour far in advance, or if your desired time slot is full, just show up at the south-side parking lot and you may be able to take the place of a no-show.



Woodbridge Ecological Reserve

Bird Seasonality in this Booklet



Indicates that the bird visits the California Delta during winter



Indicates that the bird is a year-round resident of the California Delta

©2025 Alane K. Dashner. Commercial use of this content is prohibited. Do-good organizations (nonprofits and charities) may distribute freely with attribution and request voluntary donations for the print booklet. The current electronic version of this booklet is found at <https://explorelodi.weebly.com/>

Attribution: "text by Alane K. Dashner of Lodi, CA"



Explore Lodi

Wood Duck

A Celebrity Interview



[Culture Vulture Magazine] Oh my goodness, you're even more handsome in real life! Wood you have time for an interview, Mr. Wood Duck?

[Wood Duck] Please, call me WD. Yes, I'm between shootings.

[CV Mag] Do you and your family live here in the California Delta, WD?

[Wood Duck] Yes, and I have my people build nesting boxes in trees all around North America so that I can enjoy life above the common paddlers.

[CV Mag] Is it true that you're a duck who can perch on branches? Do you do your own stunts?

[Wood Duck] Quite so! I'd show you, but my agent won't allow. We Wood Ducks are in the biz since hatching – our duckling debut is a free-fall from the nest as high as fifty feet up – down-down-down, plop, into the water... if we're lucky.

[CV Mag] WD, I have to ask: Do you wear red contact lenses? Is your black-and-white makeup tattooed? Is that gorgeous iridescent crest a wig?

[Wood Duck] Maybe you have to ask, but I don't have to answer. How rude!



Listen to the Wood Duck



Often called the most beautiful of all waterfowl, the colorful, crested adult male Wood Duck is a joy to behold. The female is a duller brown but similarly shaped. Wood Ducks are unusual in that their webbed feet have such strong claws that the Wood Ducks can grip branches and tree bark. They nest in trees and nesting boxes. Although juvenile Wood Ducks eat insects and other invertebrates, they then mature into a vegetarian diet of marsh plants, acorns, and other seeds.

White-Tailed Kite

rhyme scheme and meter are borrowed from
The Inferno by Dante Alighieri (1321)



"Our Death now hovers up above!" the mice
in terror cry. Dark Prince am I in shining white
Their Angel, spread-winged, fixed against the skies

My panicked congregation squeaks in fright
My red eyes linger, choosing who will rise
to heaven in the belly of the Kite



Watch the
White-Tailed Kite

I judge that *this one* lives and *this one* dies
Their transubstantiation sets them free
Yet White-Tailed Kite the rodents demonize

If you see a large, mostly white bird hanging in one place high in the sky above grasslands, it's a White-Tailed Kite facing into the wind. You can almost imagine that it's being held with a kite-string. With a gentle flap of wings to hold its position, the head-down Kite steadily looks at a patch of ground until it sees prey. Kites are solitary during breeding season but roost together in large groups the rest of the year.

American Coot



Listen to the
American Coot

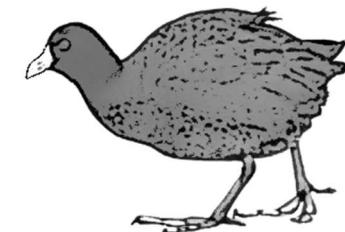
White snoot!

Black suit!

Clown feet!

American Coot

It flies like a chicken and swims like a duck
Defending its nest, it's an ornery... cluck



You'll quickly recognize an American Coot by its paper-white beak and bulky black body. Although it looks like a relative of the Duck or the Chicken, the Coot is more closely related to the Crane. Its oversized feet have individual toes that are partially webbed to boost its swimming; the webs fold out of the way while the Coot walks on land. The saying "mean old coot" when referring to a cantankerous person comes from the Coot's habit of aggressively attacking perceived invaders during nesting season.

■ Three Herons (Two Called Egret)

Long-leg flying, necks in S-es

Breeding time makes chic head-dresses

Heron? Egret? Try your guesses

"I'm Heron too," Egret confesses

All Egrets must be Herons, see?

They're in the Heron family



Great Blue Heron's truly grey, standing tall with black toupee

Our Great Egret strikes a pose, white with black silk pantyhose

Poor Snowy Egret can't compete – smaller, black bill,
yellow feet

Herons all, and two are Egrets

Stabbing fish with no big re-grets



Herons are tall, solitary hunters that eat only live prey in wetlands.

They're easy to spot when flying because though their legs are straight, their necks are pulled back toward their shoulders. Their mating season in April-May causes them to come together in rookeries as they build nests high above the ground. The eggs take several weeks to hatch, and then by midsummer the chicks are on their own.

"Your visit here I long foresaw –
now hear my history

"When pterodactyl from the sky
fell to its bitter end

"I rose from fields of wheat and rye
on feathered wings' new trend

"I flew while hominids stood up
on shaking hindmost feet

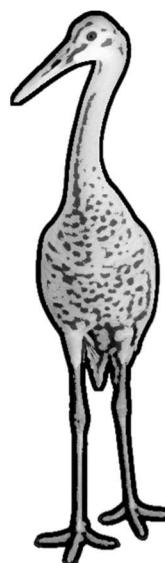
"Then Miwoks, Yokuts, tule elk
flashed by in one wingbeat

"Miners, farmers, IT techs
are but a blink of time

"Eternal Sandhill's less complex –
we are Life's dance sublime

"You too will fade, oh Delta Guest,
while my broad wings beat strong

"The coiled windpipe in my chest
will clatter ancient song."



The spell now breaks, the Crone has fled
Your car key's on its chain
Dear Delta Guest, awake in bed
You understand the Crane

An ancient bird, the Sandhill Crane is royalty in the California Delta. Its anatomy is unusual in that its trachea is so long that it loops inside the chest like a French horn, creating calls that can be heard miles away. Large "herds" begin arriving from their northern breeding grounds in September. Locally we see both the Greater Sandhill and the Lesser Sandhill – they differ in height and sharpness of beak. The Sandhills forage for grain in our fields during the day and gather at night in shallow water, attuned to any splashes from predators. The herds begin leaving in February for Oregon, Washington, Canada, and Alaska.

Cloud The Rime of the Ancient Sandhill Crane

a ghostly tale inspired by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's
"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798)

Come to the marsh, oh Delta Guest
to understand the Crane
Binoculars will aid your quest
Warm coat for winter rain

Arrive late day to see them walk
alone in search of grain
At sunset with a rattling squawk
all rise in one refrain

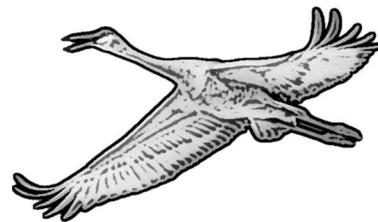
Their necks stretch forward, legs straight back
They're soon all streaming home
A sky-borne river grey and black
they land in dusky gloam

Cranes settle, settle ankle-deep
Now daylight's truly gone
Safe from coyote's splashing creep
tall sentries wait for dawn

Their spell is cast, oh Delta Guest
The witching hour's here
Your car key lost, your pounding chest,
your hackles rise in fear

What were you thinking, Delta Guest,
to come here all alone?
Beware, take care in darkness lest
you meet the Sandhill Crane
You meet the Sandhill Crane

She draws you with her skinny claw
"I am the past," quoth she



Red-Winged Blackbird:

The Lament of the California Bicolored Subspecies

(sing to the tune of "Oh Susanna!")



Listen to
"Oh Susanna!"

[verse 1]

Red-Winged Blackbirds are everywhere, Alaska to Cancún
But here in Califor-aye-ee we sing the saddest tune

[verse 2]

All Blackbirds rustle in the brush, we like to chirp with friends
We all have shoulders black and red –
that's where the likeness ends



[chorus]

Red-Winged Blackbirds, oh don't you laugh at me
I lost my gold at Sutter's hold in Califor-aye-ee

[verse 3]

Most Blackbirds have big moneybags of gold upon their wings
But miners stole our bags of gold – what sorrow they did bring

[repeat chorus]

[verse 4]

Since '49 we've tried our best – we sway on twigs and sing
Blackbirds with shoulders red and gold make fun of our
poor wings

[repeat chorus]



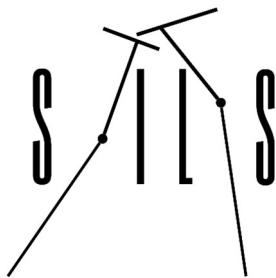
Listen to the Red-
Winged Blackbird

Red-Winged Blackbirds cluster abundantly in marshes and grasslands throughout North and Central America. Highly social birds, the male is glossy black with colorful wings and the female is streaked brown. While most male Red-Winged Blackbirds have both red and yellow patches on their wings, the California Bicolored subspecies has only red patches. Also in the California wetlands is the Tricolor Blackbird, whose male has red and white patches on its wings.



Black-Necked Stilt

TINY TUXEDO TILTS ON



Listen to the
Black-Necked Stilt



Tree Swallow



Blue face and white chin with tiny black beak
Poke out from a nesting box, launch in a streak
Zigzagging acrobat swoops overhead
Corkscrewing white-belly long wings outspread
Grasshopper, Dragonfly, Spider and Bee:
The Tree Swallow's beak is the last thing you'll see!
It swallows and swallows and swallows all day
All-you-can-eat at the Delta buffet



Listen to the
Tree Swallow

An elegant black-and-white bird, the Black-Necked Stilt is easily identified by its extraordinarily long reddish legs. Stilts wade in shallow water or walk on mudflats, hunting for small aquatic animals and insects. They build their nests on the ground close to the water and thus are vulnerable to sudden flooding. Both the mother and the father incubate Stilt eggs, which must be a recipe for success because their chicks can swim and run fast as soon as two hours after hatching.

If a small, white-bellied bird swoops over your head in the California Delta, it may well be a Tree Swallow chasing insects. This bird is voracious, sometimes eating more than 100 insects per day. During cold weather with low insect activity, the Tree Swallow can survive by eating berries. The Tree Swallow nests in tree cavities or nesting boxes.