

The Carquinez Strait is an 8-mile long channel that connects San Francisco and San Pablo bays with Suisun Bay and the Sacramento River Delta. Two remarkable regional trails—the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the San Francisco Bay Trail—converge in this area, presenting a unique opportunity to create a shared, 50-mile Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail. While still a work in progress, many miles of beautiful hiking and riding trail are open to enjoy. The sweeping vistas and variety of habitats found along the Carquinez Strait offer fabulous birding opportunities. We hope you enjoying exploring these rich and diverse sites!

1. Al Zampa Bridge and Benicia-Martinez Bridge



Waterbirds often use the Carquinez Strait as a movement corridor between the San Francisco Bay and the Central Valley. From either bridge, take in great views and watch a variety of waterfowl, grebes, cormorants, shorebirds, and gulls. At the Al Zampa Bridge, Western Gulls breed on the foundations of the bridge supports, and Double-crested Cormorants are present year-round. Also watch for Pelagic Cormorants and for Caspian Terns in the spring and summer. Osprey commonly fish along the Strait—watch for these birds to plunge into the water and come out with a fish grasped in their talons. Peregrine Falcons have nested on the Al Zampa Bridge in the past.

DIRECTIONS – (1A. Al Zampa Bridge). Access to both bridges is best by foot or bicycle via the Bay and Ridge Trails. Access the Al Zampa Bridge by vehicle from The Dead Fish restaurant parking lot. From I-80, exit on San Pablo/Pomona St. and turn west. The Dead Fish restaurant is immediately on the right.

DIRECTIONS – (1B. Benicia-Martinez Bridge). To access the Benicia-Martinez overlook from I-680 in Benicia, exit at Bayshore, turn left at Bayshore, and left on Park. Follow the signs to Vista Point.



Black-bellied Plover

2. Benicia State Recreation Area



Designated as a California Important Bird Area, Benicia State Recreation Area is a gem for the birder. Access to the Southampton Bay Wetlands is possible along the Dillon Point Rd. between the pay station and the Point. Note that there is no parking along the road; walk the Bay/Ridge Trail to the east from the pay station or parking area. In the marsh, watch for herons and egrets, White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Marsh Wren, and Red-winged Blackbird. You should see two endemic subspecies of birds only found in the San Francisco Bay region: the San Francisco Bay Common Yellowthroat and Suisun Song Sparrow. In winter evenings, watch for Short-eared Owls in the open grassy areas.

From the final parking area along Dillon Point Rd., look for migrating shorebirds and waterfowl including Green-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Black-bellied Plover, Willet, Dunlin, and Least and Western sandpipers. In the winter, open water species include Greater and Lesser scaup, Canvasback, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Surf Scoter, Ruddy Duck, Western and Clark’s grebes and American White Pelican. Finally, by walking the trail to Dillon Point, you can watch and listen for Rufous-crowned Sparrows on the grassy slope below the rocky cliff; these are year-round residents. Cormorants, ducks, and gulls fly by the Point during migration and winter.

DIRECTIONS– From I-780 east of Vallejo, take the State Park Rd./Columbus Parkway exit. If you are traveling east on the freeway, the entrance to the park will be immediately off the off ramp. If traveling west you will exit onto Columbus Parkway. At Rose Dr. turn left onto the freeway overpass and onto State Park Rd. The entrance to the park will be on your right.

3. Benicia Waterfront



Birding the Benicia Waterfront is best in the winter, and also during fall or spring migration. A walk along either side of the Benicia Marina may offer close views of water-birds. In the winter at the Benicia Pier, Greater and Lesser scaup, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Surf Scoter, as well as Clark’s and Western grebes are present. American White and Brown pelicans both visit in the summer months. During low tides when the mudflat is exposed, you may find migrating and wintering shorebirds like Semipalmated Plover, Willet, and Western and Least sandpipers. Western, California and Ring-billed gulls may occur at any season, but in winter also look for Herring, Thayer’s and Glaucous-winged gulls.

DIRECTIONS – From I-780, exit on E. 2nd Street towards downtown Benicia. Take this to the end, turn right on E. B Street and then left on E. 1st Street to access the Benicia Pier. From the end of E. 5th Street, there is access to additional shoreline and a small salt marsh adjacent to the harbor.

4. Waterbird Regional Preserve



The Waterbird Regional Preserve is commonly known as McNabney Marsh to commemorate the tireless efforts of Al McNabney in the preservation of this important freshwater marsh. In 1988, a spill in this 100-acre wetland filled the marsh with crude oil. Restoration efforts were successful, and the size of the marsh, the mix of open water, and the dense emergent vegetation make it a breeding area for Canada Geese, Mallard, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, American Coot, Common Moorhen, Green Heron, Pied-billed Grebe and even American Bittern. During migration, the number and diversity of waterfowl increase, with American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye occurring at this time.

Watch the mud at the edge of the marsh for migrating shorebirds. Long-billed Dowitcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Least and Western sandpipers, and Dunlin are common. Recently, Great-tailed Grackles have arrived to breed in the marsh alongside Red-winged Blackbirds. Northern Harriers and the less common Merlin, Peregrine Falcon or Golden Eagle may be spotted. In the open grassland of the Meadowlark Ridge Loop, you may find American Kestrel, Western Kingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, and Western Meadowlark.

DIRECTIONS – From I-680 (immediately south of the Benicia-Martinez Bridge) take the Marina Vista/Waterfront Rd. exit. At the end of the off-ramp turn right onto Waterfront Rd. and drive a quarter mile to Waterbird Way. Take this to the right and the preserve entrance is on your right.

5. Martinez Regional Shoreline



Martinez Regional Shoreline offers a variety of habitats. The duck pond at the base of Ferry Point is good for waterfowl. Waterfowl numbers and diversity are highest in winter when American Wigeon, Gadwall, Greater and Lesser scaup, Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, and Bufflehead are present. The mudflats and wetlands host Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Willet,



Spotted Towhee



Suisun Song Sparrow (an endemic subspecies of this region)

Marbled Godwit, Dunlin, Least Sandpiper and other shore-birds during migration and winter. The tidal marsh on the west side of Alhambra Creek has been recently restored and is a superb place to see the large-billed Suisun subspecies of the Song Sparrow, along with Common Yellowthroat and Marsh Wren. Black Rails have been found calling from this area in broad daylight—listen for this rare and incredibly difficult-to-see species from the boardwalk bridge, west of the arch bridge over the creek. Clapper Rails have been seen here, and the more common Virginia and Sora rails as well. Black-crowned Night-herons roost in the pines at the end of Berrellesa Street.

DIRECTIONS – From Hwy 4 in Martinez, exit at Alhambra Ave. and go north. Turn right on Escobar and left on Ferry Street; follow Ferry Street into the park. From I-680 in Martinez, exit at Marina Vista and go west. Turn right on Ferry Street and drive into the park. The Grangers’ Wharf section of the park can be accessed by taking Marina Vista (one way) from Ferry Street, turning right on Berrellesa Street and continuing to the end.

6. Mt. Wanda/John Muir National Historic Site



The trail leading to Mt. Wanda was a favorite of John Muir, who used to walk it with his daughters, Helen and Wanda, for whom the hilltop is named. The walk through oaks, bays, and buckeyes eventually leads to open grassland towards the top, and offers some wonderful views from the Carquinez Strait to Mt. Diablo. Look and listen for oak forest species including Oak Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Western Scrub-Jay, as well as Spotted Towhee, Brown Creeper, Lesser Goldfinch, Western Wood-Pewee, and House Wren. In the grassland watch for raptors and Western Bluebirds. During the breeding season Western Kingbirds are here, as well as many species of swallow.

DIRECTIONS –Exit Hwy 4 at Alhambra Ave. Turn south, then turn right (immediately, if you’ve exited eastbound) onto Franklin Canyon Rd., and make an immediate left into the parking lot.

7. Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline



The Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline includes parks near both Crockett and Martinez. Near Crockett is the Bull Valley Staging Area and Eckley Pier. Here the Bay Trail gives access to Bull Valley, as well as the Carquinez Overlook Trail. The Bull Valley habitat is a mix of oak woodlands and moist riparian woodland, while the Overlook Trail has plenty of grassland. Watch for several species of swallow in the breeding season as well as Western Bluebirds, Western Meadowlarks, and raptors. During the spring and early summer, listen and look for Grasshopper Sparrows. The Eckley Pier is a good place to scope for waterbirds.

Near Martinez, the Nejedly Staging Area offers access to the Bay Trail (Franklin Ridge Loop), which encompasses grassland and oak savannah, as well as the Ridge Trail (Hulet Hornbeck Tr.) which climbs through grassland and oak savanna. Birding is great at the Nejedly Staging Area with Red-shouldered Hawk, Acorn, Downy and Nuttall’s woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatch, Oak Titmouse, Bushtit, and Spotted and California towhees.

DIRECTIONS – (7A. Bull Valley Staging Area and Eckley Pier). In the town of Crockett, take Pomona Street east, which becomes Carquinez Scenic Drive. Follow until the well signed staging area is on your left. Drive to the bottom of the hill to access the pier and other trails.

DIRECTIONS – (7B. Nejedly Staging Area). From downtown Martinez, if traveling north on Alhambra Ave, turn left onto Escobar Street, drive three blocks and turn right onto Talbart Street. Drive three blocks again and bear left onto Carquinez Scenic Drive. The entrance to Nejedly Staging area will be on your left.

Parking	Fee
Wheelchair accessible	Hiking trail
Restroom	Bicycle trail
Picnic tables	Horse trail
Information sign	



8. Fernandez Ranch



This beautiful area just opened to the public in the summer of 2010. Cross the bridge over Rodeo Creek from the parking area to two trails that offer superb birding. The Black Phoebe Trail to the left borders a riparian woodland then angles uphill as the Whipsnake Trail, giving access to an oak forest. Alternatively, the Windmill Trail to the right of the bridge borders a grassland and a narrow riparian corridor before heading up into the oaks. In the open grasslands, watch for Western Kingbird, Western Bluebird, Lark Sparrow, and Western Meadowlark. Raptors include Red-tailed Hawk, Turkey Vulture, and American Kestrel. During the breeding season, the oak forest and riparian habitats are bustling with Nuttall’s Woodpecker, Western Scrub-Jay, Oak Titmouse, Bushtit and White-breasted Nuthatch. Also watch for California Quail, Wild Turkey, Band-tailed Pigeon, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, House Wren, Warbling Vireo, Lazuli Bunting, and Black-headed Grosbeak. During migration, Western Tanager and various warblers, vireos, and sparrows can be found along Rodeo Creek.

DIRECTIONS – From I-80, take Hwy 4 East. Pass the Franklin Canyon Golf Course on your right, and take the unmarked exit (Christie Rd.) just past the golf course and immediately before the railroad overpass. Christie Rd. is a narrow country road; after approximately three-quarters of a mile you will see the entrance to the park on your right. Christie Rd. is accessible only from eastbound Hwy 4. From Martinez, exit at Franklin Canyon Rd. (Exit 3) and return east on Hwy 4.



Western Bluebird



Orange-crowned Warbler

9. Crockett Hills Regional Park



Crockett Hills Regional Park is an extensive and diverse area of oak woodlands, oak savannahs, open grasslands, and chaparral. Two trails in particular offer great birding. The Edwards Creek Trail borders the riparian zone and then enters the oak woodlands. Birds here include common forest species such as Downy and Nuttall’s Woodpeckers, Oak Titmouse, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Steller’s Jay, Western Scrub-Jay, and Hutton’s Vireo. Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Lazuli Bunting are present during the breeding season.

In winter, watch for Golden-crowned, White-crowned, and Lincoln sparrows as well as Townsend’s and Yellow-rumped warblers. The lower portion of the Crockett Ranch Trail offers access to similar birds as seen on the Edwards Creek Trail, but once you cross under Cummings Skyway, habitats change to a mix of grassland and chaparral. Look for California Thrasher, California Quail, and Wrentit in the chaparral, and White-tailed Kite, Western Bluebird, and Western Meadowlark in the grasslands. Look for Golden Eagles and Turkey Vultures soaring overhead.

DIRECTIONS – From I-80, exit at San Pablo/Pomona Street. Take Pomona east into the town of Crockett. At just over a quarter mile there will be a middle school on your right. Head south on Crockett Blvd. immediately east of the school, continue for another quarter mile, and the entrance to the park will be on your right.

Birding

THE CARQUINEZ STRAIT SCENIC LOOP TRAIL

Pacific Gas and Electric Company

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Birding the Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail is a collaboration among the Bay Area Ridge Trail, San Francisco Bay Trail, and the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. For more detailed trail information, please visit www.baytrail.org or www.ridgetrail.org. For additional copies of this guide or a complete bird list for these sites, visit www.sfbbo.org. We thank our generous supporters.