

American River Parkway

Discovery Park

This park lies at the confluence of the American and Sacramento Rivers just north of downtown Sacramento and extends into north Sacramento. The western-most portion of the Jedediah Smith Memorial Trail begins here and can be walked or ridden 30-plus miles to Beal's Point on Folsom Lake at its eastern end. Discovery Park contains streamside habitat, open mowed grass with shade trees and picnic tables, brushy areas of dense shrubs, and riverside woodlands containing towering cottonwoods, oaks, box elders and other riparian species.

Note: There are often homeless camps in the area, so going alone is not recommended.

Birding the site: The best way to bird this park is to walk an approximately two-mile loop beginning at the base of the bridge that enters the park from the Garden Highway. Walk along the section of the bike trail just to the left of the bridge that runs south toward the river until it meets the main bike trail. Turn left onto the trail, follow it into the open area along the river, and through the open areas until you reach the small bridge that crosses the slough. At this point, you can retrace this path (that runs along the north side of the slough and parallel to the Garden Highway) or you can turn left onto a dirt trail that leads back to the bridge into the park.

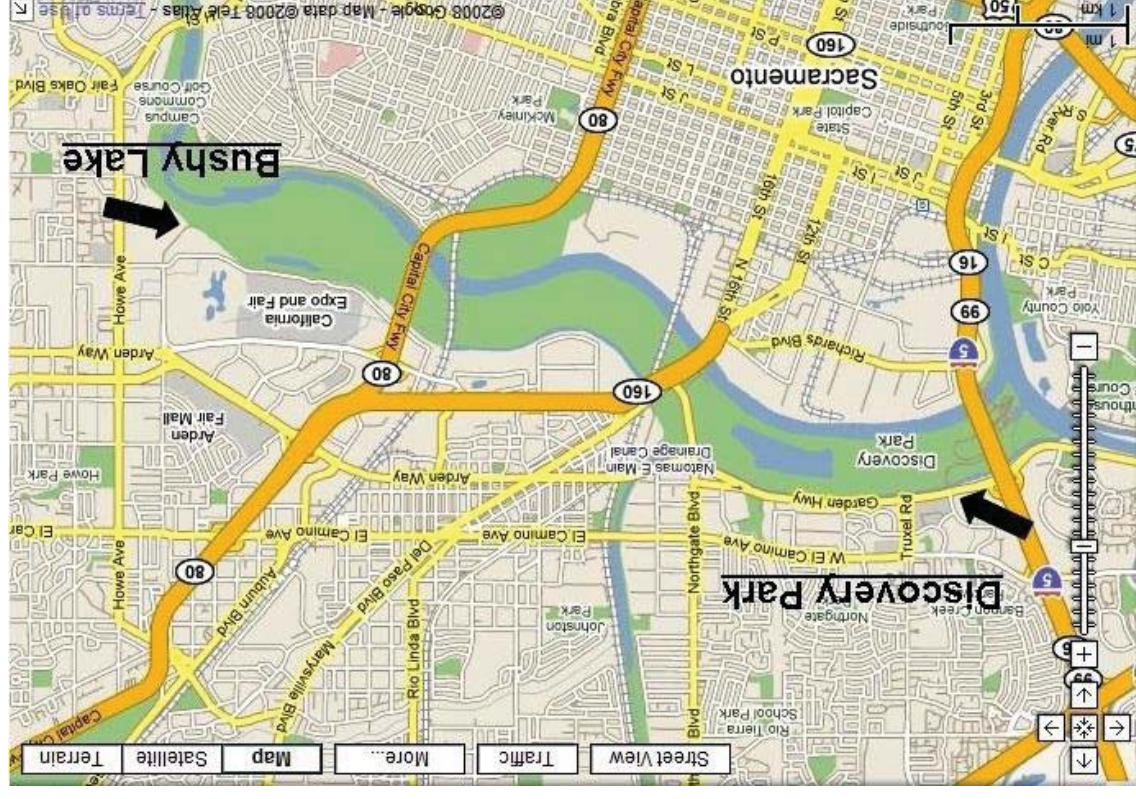
Like the rest of the American River Parkway, this park is a magnet for migrating birds and winter residents such as Hermit Thrush, the crowned sparrows, occasional White-throated Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow and Fox Sparrow. California Quail, Bewick's Wren, House Wren, Nuttall's Woodpecker and Downy Woodpecker are year-round residents. Summer has produced Lazuli Bunting and Blue Grosbeak in the broad grassland area between the river and the line of trees.

In winter, check the American River for Common Goldeneye and occasional Barrow's Goldeneye. Peregrine Falcons have been found hunting the large pond at the east end of the park, and Western Bluebirds can be found in the open ground near the river. In the spring, American Kestrel, White-tailed Kite, Red-shouldered Hawk and Red-tailed Hawk have all been found nesting in the park. Cooper's Hawk may be found year-round and Sharp-shinned Hawk is found from fall to early spring.

Directions: From downtown Sacramento, take Interstate 5 north (2.8 miles north of Highway 50) and exit at the Garden Highway (the first exit

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after crossing the American River). Turn left onto Garden Highway and take the first right onto the bridge that drops into the park. The entrance fee is currently \$5 per vehicle (or a \$50 annual pass; see introduction to this chapter).



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In order to avoid crowds on Saturdays and Sundays, a second option (which also allows easy viewing of the birds in the slough) is to park below the Garden Highway levee. To do this, instead of turning right into the park, turn left onto Natomas Park Drive, then turn right and park on either side of Capital Park Drive. Then walk up Natomas Park Drive, across the Garden Highway and the bridge over the slough, and down into the park.

Maureen Geiger

Bushy Lake and the Cal Expo Floodplain

Bushy Lake is formed by a shallow basin along the American River Parkway which collects the Arden-Arcade drainage from both Chicken Ranch Slough and Strong Ranch Slough. A special dam removes the debris (tree limbs and trash) from the water before it is pumped into the river. It's not much of a lake anymore; a better title might be Bushy Marsh. It started out as a borrow pit for a golf course that was never completed during the mid-1960s. If you look closely at the adjoining floodplain, you can see some elevated areas where the earth diggings were dumped. For many years, it was a good fishing lake, and there were many trails all along the lake. Currently, thick aquatic vegetation clogs the lake and the remaining fish are hard to find.

Birding the site: Birding can be good whether wet or dry. The best way to bird the lake is from the levee, where stretches of water can be seen through the trees.

With the Cal Expo R.V. Park on your right, walk west on the bike trail or the narrow road which leads up onto the levee; a large stream overflow basin will be on your left. Walk west on this levee heading toward the white Cal Expo tower. The lake is about half a mile from the starting point on the levee which runs along the south border of Cal Expo. Although there are a few trails closer to the lake and at its level, they have mainly been created by the homeless people who sometimes use the area. In addition, the vegetation along the lake is so thick, it is nearly impossible to see through. The best viewing is from the levee.

Birding this area can be especially good in the spring and fall because the riparian habitat around the lake, especially willows and cottonwoods, attracts many migrating warblers, vireos, flycatchers, etc., and from the levee, you are looking down on the area. The lake is good year-round for Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Wood Ducks, Mallards and Common Moorhens. Red-tailed Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawks and

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Great Horned Owls frequently nest in the area. The lake runs almost all the way to the Interstate 80 bridge.

There is also a slough that runs between the lake and the levee maintained by a beaver dam for the final quarter-mile before the bridge across Interstate 80. At the bridge, you can either retrace your steps, or walk down from the levee and follow the homeless trail along the freeway fence and across the floodplain toward the river and the American River Bike Trail. Any of the fire roads that cross the floodplain, the bike path, or the horse trail near the river will take you back to the parking lot.

This large area from the river to the levee and Interstate 80 back toward the R.V. park is about 400 acres. In addition to all of the birds, it harbors a great deal of wildlife such as deer, coyotes, beaver and otters. Sometimes R.V.-ers will have bird feeders that are worth checking.

Directions: Bushy Lake is near the Arden Fair area of Sacramento. From downtown Sacramento, take Highway 50/Capital City Freeway 1.7 miles east of Interstate 5. Take the Capital City Freeway (Business 80) exit toward Reno. After 3.4 miles, exit the Capital City Freeway at Exposition Boulevard. In 1.1 miles, passing Cal Expo, turn right onto Ethan Way. After 0.5 mile, turn right at the intersection of Hurley Way and Ethan Way onto Zwieback Street, and park along the street or in the small lot beyond the cul-de-sac.

Joe Ceriani