

Sacramento Bar and Bannister Park

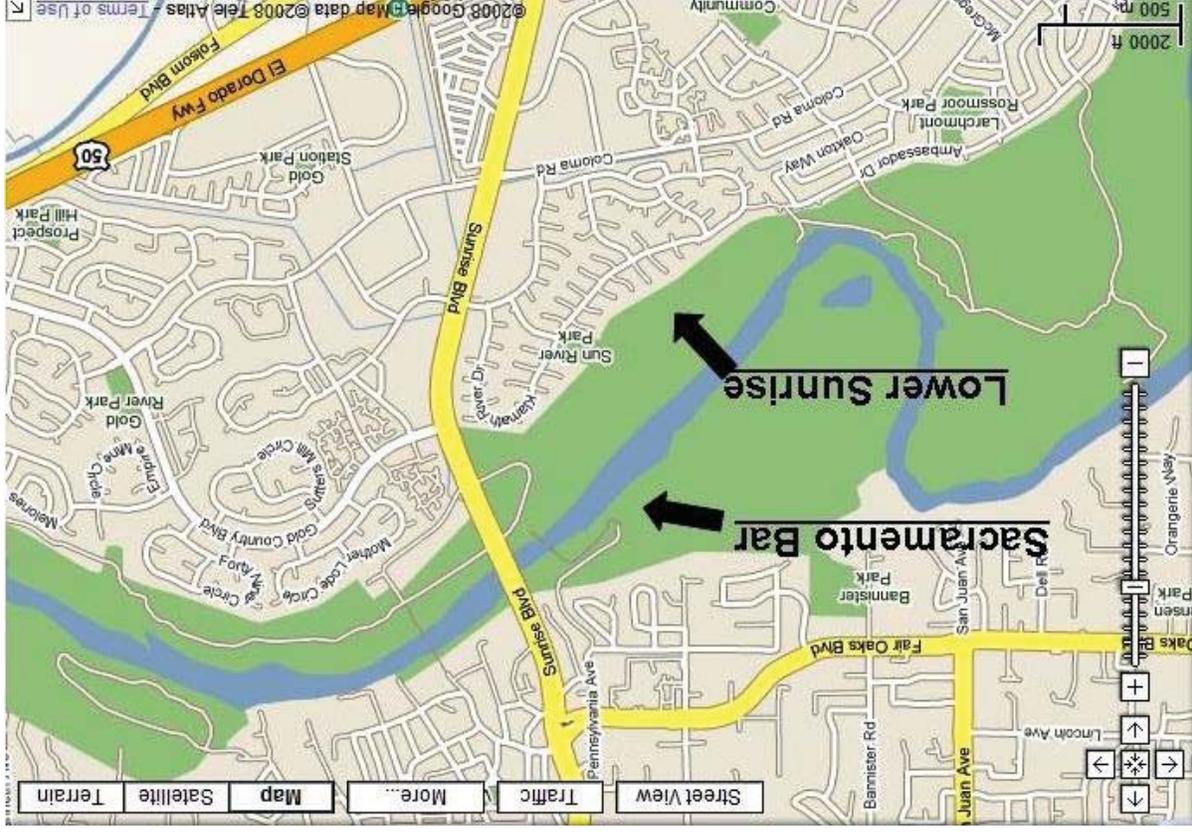
This is a large area on the north side of the river across from the Lower Sunrise Area that can easily satisfy a half-day of birding. There is a similar mix of habitats—cottonwood and willow riparian, interior live oak forest, and open areas with gravel tailings—but there is a wider corridor of habitat and numerous trails to get away from the crowds.

Birding the site: From the Sacramento Bar parking area, a loop of approximately two miles will cover many habitats. A bike trail connects the parking area with Bannister Park and a service road and a network of informal trails nearer the river await exploration. You can take the service road that runs along the river, eventually leading to the two sharp bends in the river at the San Juan Rapids. In this section there are several ponds of trapped water left behind in the gravel tailings that can harbor waterbirds. A wide trail heads north along the river and connects to the bike trail just below the hill at Bannister Park. At this site, near the creek, Yellow-breasted Chats are sometimes heard in spring, and this may be one of the few sites in Sacramento County where they breed (this site may also be reached from Bannister Park by descending the hill on the bike trail, and looking and listening along the creek that crosses the bike trail). You can return to the Sacramento Bar parking area via the bike trail, shaded by a dense stand of interior live oaks for most of the way.

From the Sacramento Bar parking area, you can walk across the river to Lower Sunrise via Jim's Bridge just below the Sunrise Boulevard bridge.

Directions: From downtown Sacramento, take Highway 50 east for 14 miles from Interstate 5, and take the Sunrise Boulevard exit. Go north for 2.3 miles on Sunrise Boulevard and turn left onto Fair Oaks Boulevard after crossing the river. Take an immediate left onto Pennsylvania Avenue, and follow it 0.4 mile to the parking area. For Bannister Park, travel west on Fair Oaks Boulevard 0.8 mile from Sunrise Avenue, and turn left on Bannister Road. The entrance fee is currently \$5 per vehicle (or a \$50 annual pass; see introduction to this chapter).

Chris Conard



American River Parkway

Lower Sunrise Area

The Lower Sunrise area is on the south side of the American River, and runs from the Sunrise Boulevard bridge downstream to the picnic area of Ambassador Park. Low bluffs overlook the river, their banks covered with blackberry, coyote bush, willow and poison oak. Cottonwoods, live oaks and valley oaks shade the horse trail and much of the bicycle trail. If you walk along the bicycle trail, always be aware of cyclists.

Birding the site: Colonies of Acorn Woodpeckers can be seen as well as Nuttall's Woodpeckers and an occasional Downy Woodpecker. Oak Titmouse, Bush tits and White-breasted Nuthatches move through the trees. Tree Swallows can be seen year-round, though there are fewer in the winter after their migrant cousins have gone south. Bewick's Wrens, Spotted Towhees and California Towhees are year-round residents and are joined by House Wrens in spring. In the fall and spring, migrating songbirds such as Townsend's Warblers, Hermit Warblers, Nashville Warblers, Wilson's Warblers, Bullock's Orioles and Black-headed Grosbeak may be spotted. Red-shouldered Hawks can often be heard calling and are seen year-round. Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, Sharp-shinned Hawks and Cooper's Hawks may also be found. In November, Common Goldeneyes arrive, and if one searches through the flocks, a Barrow's Goldeneye may be spotted. Common Mergansers are more numerous in the winter, but are present year-round. Gulls and Turkey Vultures arrive in large numbers when the salmon return to spawn. Although California Gulls, Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls are the most common species, one might also see Glaucous-winged Gulls, Thayer's Gulls, or Mew Gulls. Late fall through early spring, Osprey and an occasional Bald Eagle can be seen. Black Phoebe and Belted Kingfishers forage along the river's edge. The fall also brings White-crowned Sparrows and Golden-crowned Sparrows, along with the more elusive Lincoln's Sparrows and Fox Sparrows. Dark-eyed Juncos, Hermit Thrush and Ruby-crowned Kinglets move through the trees and bushes.

From the Lower Sunrise parking area, you can walk across the river to Sacramento Bar via Jim's Bridge just below the Sunrise Boulevard bridge.

Directions: From downtown Sacramento, take Highway 50 east for 14 miles from Interstate 5, exit at Sunrise Boulevard, and go north for 1.5 miles. Just before the approach to the Sunrise Avenue bridge over the American River, follow the sign indicating river access to the right and continue to the entry station. About 75 feet past the entry station, the

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road forks. Turn left and follow the road back under the Sunrise bridge and proceed to the parking area. Lower Sunrise can also be entered from Ambassador Park. From Highway 50, take Sunrise Boulevard north for 0.8 mile and turn left on Coloma Road. Travel 0.9 mile to El Manto Drive and turn right. Continue 0.2 mile to Ambassador Drive. Turn right to reach the parking area of Ambassador Park. The entrance fee is currently \$5 per vehicle (or a \$50 annual pass; see introduction to this chapter).

Barbara Mohr

Sailor Bar

Sailor Bar is on the north side of the river across from Upper Sunrise. The habitat is a mix of riparian, oak woodland, open area and gravel tailings. Live oaks and blue oaks are the predominant trees on the hillsides, and there are stands of willow, alder and cottonwood along the river.

Birding the site: There is a parking area down and to the right of the Illinois Avenue entrance; just north of it is a fishing pond where you can find Pied-billed Grebes and Mallards mixed in with domestic ducks. Red-winged Blackbirds inhabit the cattails in the spring and summer, and Red-shouldered Hawks frequent the area. Hutton's Vireos may be seen here. From late fall through early spring, a walk around the pond may reveal Fox Sparrows, Hermit Thrushes or a Lincoln's Sparrow in the blackberry tangles. Song Sparrows, Spotted Towhees and California Towhees are resident. Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Purple Finches (rare) and Yellow-rumped Warblers make the oak-covered hillsides their winter residence. In the open areas, you may see White-tailed Kites and Red-tailed Hawks. Wild Turkeys are seen occasionally in the winter, and White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows, House Finches, Lesser Goldfinches and American Goldfinches feed on thistle and other seeds.

The road leads west to other parking areas by the river, and if you walk along the trails, you may find Spotted Sandpipers, Greater Yellowlegs, Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets hunting along the water's edge. Black Phoebe, Bush tits and Acorn Woodpeckers are seen year-round, and in the spring and summer you may see Ash-throated Flycatchers and possibly Bullock's Orioles.

Directions: From downtown Sacramento, take Highway 50 east for 17.5 miles from Interstate 5, and exit at Hazel Avenue. Drive north over the freeway and cross the American River. Turn left onto Winding Way (1.3

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miles from Highway 50), and go for 0.5 mile; then turn left onto Illinois Avenue and continue to the end of the road. Watch for speed bumps. The entrance fee is currently \$5 per vehicle (or a \$50 annual pass; see introduction to this chapter).

Pete Hayes

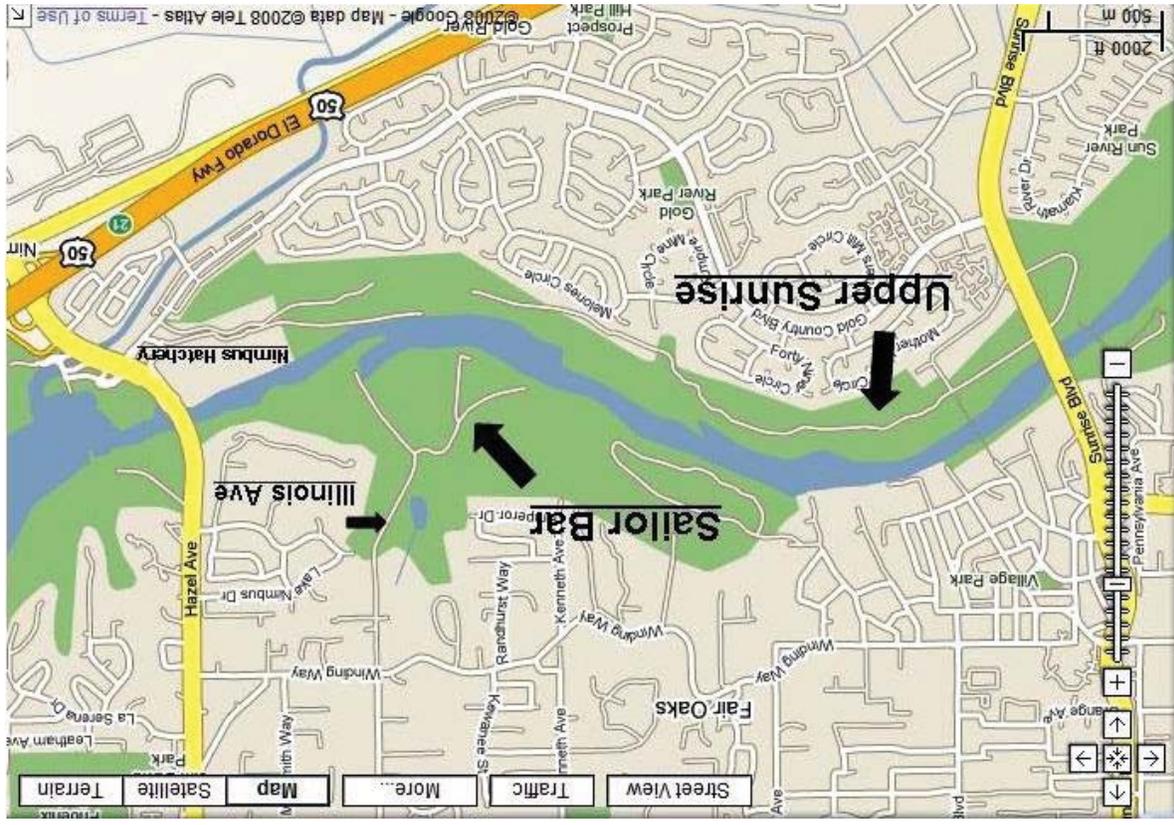
Upper Sunrise Area and the Nimbus Hatchery

The Upper Sunrise area goes from the east side of the Sunrise Avenue bridge upstream to the base of Nimbus Dam. The habitat is similar to Lower Sunrise, but the land rises slightly higher above the river. Shortly below the fish hatchery, one can see toyon and gray pines scattered among the oaks. This is one of the best inland sites in the state for Barrow's Goldeneye and gull watching.

Birding the site: In the spring, California poppies, styrax with its clusters of white blossoms, and California buckeye put on a colorful display. Bush monkey flower is fairly abundant in the open areas, and Anna's Hummingbirds can be seen sipping nectar from its orange-colored blossoms. Migrating Rufous Hummingbirds and Black-chinned Hummingbirds (spring and summer residents) may also be spotted.

White-throated Swifts can be seen year-round, and in the spring they are seen flying to and from their nests in the drain holes under the Hazel Avenue bridge. Spring also brings Cliff Swallows who build their bottle-shaped mud nests on the side of the bridge. Northern Rough-winged Swallows and an occasional Barn Swallow can be seen also. Tree Swallows are seen year-round, but are more numerous in the spring. Forster's Terns and an occasional Caspian Tern cruise up and down the river as well as Double-crested Cormorants. Green Heron (often seen inside the hatchery enclosures), Great Egret, Snowy Egret and Great Blue Heron can be seen along the rocky shore across the river. The riparian area along the river is home to Red-shouldered Hawk, occasional Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk and Great Horned Owl. Black Phoebe and Belted Kingfisher forage along the water's edge, and Spotted Sandpiper is often seen on the rocky shore of the river. Bewick's Wren, Spotted Towhee, California Towhee, Oak Titmouse and Bushitit can be seen year-round, and from fall through spring they are joined by White-crowned Sparrow and Golden-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Western Bluebird, Lesser Goldfinch and American Goldfinch can be seen in the more open areas. In the fall and winter, one may see a Phainopepla perched on top of an oak tree or foraging in a cluster of mistletoe.

American River Parkway



American River Parkway

The main Chinook salmon run begins in October, and hundreds of gulls as well as large numbers of Turkey Vultures arrive to feed on the dying fish. This winter feast may bring in an occasional Bald Eagle. Ospreys are also often seen in winter. Flocks of Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser often have a Barrow's Goldeneye and, occasionally, a Red-breasted Merganser among them. The bluffs by the hatchery offer an excellent viewing place to watch the gulls and ducks, and a careful search through the flocks of Herring Gulls, Ring-billed Gulls and California Gulls may reveal some less common species such as Glaucous-winged Gull, Thayer's Gull, Mew Gull, and, irregularly, Western Gull. Glaucous Gulls have been found at this site, and other rarities are always possible.

From the hatchery parking area, you can walk past the fish ladder where use trails follow the river bank and eventually connect to the bike trail which leads to the Sunrise Access parking lots and beyond.

Directions: From downtown Sacramento, take Highway 50 east for 17.5 miles from Interstate 5, and exit at Hazel Avenue. For the upper end: go north on Hazel Avenue. Just before the bridge over the river, there is a traffic light at Gold Country Boulevard. Turn left and make a quick right into the entrance of the Nimbus Fish Hatchery (watch for bikes on the entrance road). There is no parking fee here, though it may be full on weekends. The hatchery has restrooms in the visitor center. For the lower end: follow the directions for the Lower Sunrise Area. Go past the entry station to where the road forks, and turn right. Follow the road to the parking area by the old Fair Oaks Bridge. You can walk the approximately 2.5 miles along the bike trail to the hatchery. The entrance fee is currently \$5 per vehicle (or a \$50 annual pass; see introduction to this chapter).

Barbara Mohr

