

Sacramento County—East

Mather Lake

Mather Lake is a 64-acre lake surrounded by 158 acres of riparian habitat, upland scrub, seasonal wetland and annual grassland. The Mather Park Land Use Plan designates the north, east and south sides of the Lake as a wildlife preserve. Access may change over time.

Presently, the entrance is on the west side of the lake and is known as the Mather Lake Rotary Recreation Area, which is managed by the County of Sacramento. The area is open to the public for fishing and wildlife viewing from dawn to dusk.

Birding the site: Bird species present year-round include Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Bushitit, Double-crested Cormorant, Common Moorhen, White-tailed Kite, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk and Great Horned Owl. Regular nesters in recent years have included Western Kingbird, Bullock's Oriole, Ash-throated Flycatcher and Nuttall's Woodpecker. Winter visitors regularly include Ring-necked Duck, Canvasback and Mallard. Summer sightings bring Green Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron and American Bittern. Western Tanager, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler and Yellow Warbler can be seen during spring and fall migration. Of note, the southeastern area of marsh has been a regular nesting site for Yellow-headed Blackbird, although in recent years there has been a decline in their numbers, possibly due to the increasing population of nesting Great-tailed Grackles. Bird species counts range from 30 in the winter to 50 per day in the spring. Mammals spotted include river otters, muskrats and coyotes.

Directions: Exit Highway 50 at Sunrise Boulevard (14 miles from downtown Sacramento at Interstate 5) and go south for 3.8 miles. Turn right on Douglas Road, drive 1.0 mile, turn left on Eagle's Nest Road for 0.2 mile, then turn left into the park. There is currently a fee of \$5 per vehicle. A \$50 annual vehicle pass (also valid for the American River Parkway and other Sacramento County parks) can be purchased from the Sacramento County Department of Parks and Recreation (www.sacparks.net).

Wayne Blunk



Eastern Sacramento County Grasslands and Blue Oak Woodlands

The following five sections provide details on great birding areas from fall through spring. They can be combined into a full day of birding, or taken in sections as time allows. The main attraction for most birders is the chance to see winter raptors and Lewis's Woodpeckers in a relatively natural setting. It must be mentioned that the areas along Scott and White Rock Roads are under extreme development pressure, and the descriptions that follow are of the areas as they exist today. The Sacramento Valley Conservancy spearheaded a multi-partner effort to purchase 4,000 acres through which Latrobe Road travels—Deer Creek Hills. Determined efforts to preserve open space in the southeastern county are vital if we are to continue enjoying these wonderful birding areas.

Note: Scott Road and White Rock Road are experiencing increasingly heavy traffic, so use caution and pull completely off the road when parking.



White Rock and Payen Roads

Vast grassland expanses and rolling hills provide excellent opportunities to look for Ferruginous Hawks, Prairie Falcons, and other winter raptors. Payen Road has few cars and allows a leisurely visit.

Birding the site: At the corral by the junction of White Rock and Scott Roads, there is a safe place to park where you can scan for raptors. Sparrows are often on or near the corrals.

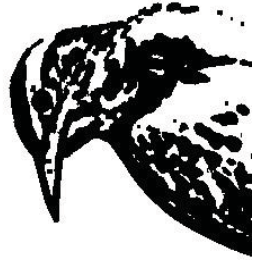
From the corrals, travel 1.2 miles east to Payen Road. The cattle enclosures usually host a large flock of blackbirds. You may be able to find Brown-headed Cowbirds, Tricolored Blackbirds, and, rarely, Yellow-headed Blackbirds among the abundant Red-winged Blackbirds and Brewer's Blackbirds. Payen Road travels south for 1.5 miles past a model airplane staging area and ends at private property. There are few places to pull completely off the road, but since there is very little traffic, pull over, and it is usually safe to get out of your car.

From mid-October through March, a Prairie Falcon is often present along the road and Ferruginous Hawks may be sitting on the hillsides to the south. Golden Eagles, Rough-legged Hawks, and Merlins are found here, though not quite so dependably. Check the fields and the abandoned railroad culverts for Burrowing Owls.

Begin the next tour by heading west on White Rock Road for 2.5 miles from Payen Road, and heading south on Scott Road.

Directions: From the Scott Road exit on Highway 50 near Folsom (23 miles east of downtown Sacramento at Interstate 5), travel south for 1.6 miles to White Rock Road (the corrals). Payen Road is 1.2 miles to the east of the corrals.

Chris Conard



Scott Road

This area is primarily open grasslands interspersed with oaks. There are a few small creeks that normally dry up in the summer. Most of the area is fenced close to the road so parking can be difficult. Care must be taken not to impair traffic. The main use of the land is grazing. Climbing over the fences and walking on private land without the owner's permission is definitely not recommended. Landowners are very sensitive about trespassing. The area is of particular interest from the first fall rains until the water dries up (normally in July).

Birding the site: While traveling through the grasslands, watch the fences for Savannah, Vesper (rare) and Lark Sparrows, House Finches, Purple Finches (uncommon, winter), Western Meadowlarks, Northern Mockingbirds, Horned Larks, American Pipits, Western Bluebirds, Mountain Bluebirds (rare, winter), Western Kingbirds (spring, summer), Say's Phoebe (winter), Loggerhead Shrikes and American Kestrels.

In the open country you should continuously scan rocks, posts, trees and the skies for birds of prey. Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, American Kestrels, and Turkey Vultures are common. In winter, Merlins, American Kestrels, Rough-legged, Red-shouldered, Sharp-shinned, Cooper's and Ferruginous Hawks are occasionally seen, as are Golden and Bald Eagles. Prairie Falcons and White-tailed Kites are seen on most trips.

Watch for Black Phoebes near and under bridges (they often nest there). In any of the clusters of trees along the streams during spring and fall, watch for migrating warblers like Black-throated Gray, Wilson's, Nashville, Orange-crowned, and Yellow-rumped. You may also find Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Golden-crowned Kinglets (rare), White-breasted Nuthatches, Bushtits, Brown Creepers (rare), Bewick's Wrens and Oak Titmouse.

After turning onto Scott Road from White Rock Road, the first pond on the left is usually not very productive, but Belted Kingfishers, American Coots, Ring-necked Ducks and shorebirds are sometimes represented. Special finds during winter in this area are Lewis's Woodpecker and Phainopepla. The trees along the entire route should be watched, but especially in the first 2.5 miles from White Rock Road. There are a few dirt pullouts, and a large paved pullout 2.0 miles from White Rock Road. The area by the first bridge should also be watched for Rock Wrens, California and Spotted Towhees. Acorn Woodpeckers are generally

common along the entire route, but Nuttall's and Downy Woodpeckers are also often seen. Although they have not been seen recently, the marsh on the left, 2.4 miles from White Rock Road, used to have nesting Yellow-headed Blackbirds in the cattails. When there is open water there, you may find American Coots and ducks.

The second large bridge, Carson Creek, is usually excellent when there is a lot of water in the stream. Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Greater Yellowlegs, Killdeer and Wilson's Snipe are seen often. Many spring migrants might be seen: Lazuli Buntings, Cassin's and Warbling Vireos, Western Tanagers, Wilson's, Yellow, MacGillivray's and Nashville Warblers.

At 5.5 miles, Scott Road crosses Deer Creek. In high water, the stream flows over the road. This area usually has Tree Swallows in spring and summer and is sometimes very productive in migration. Watch for traffic.

Directions: Head east on Highway 50 to Prairie City Road (21 miles from downtown Sacramento at Interstate 5). Turn right and head south until the road dead ends at White Rock Road. Turn left (east) on White Rock Road, and continue to Scott Road where you will again turn south (right). Follow this road until it dead ends at Latrobe Road, where you can continue into the next section.

Bruce Swinehart

Latrobe Road (Deer Creek Hills)

With a mix of blue oak woodland, savanna, and expansive grasslands, a trip along Latrobe Road has a diversity of habitats and is one of the few areas in Sacramento County to have a real sense of remoteness. Even if the birding is slow, the scenery makes the trip worthwhile. Please note that a vehicle with moderate clearance is required to travel beyond the second crossing of Grevis Creek, but four-wheel-drive is not needed. Also, due to its remoteness, Latrobe Road often serves as an illegal dumping ground and as an occasional shooting gallery. Caution is always advised and going with a friend is wise. Docent-led walks are offered by the Sacramento Valley Conservancy, and a public access plan is in development. For more information, visit sacramentovalleyconservancy.org or call 916-731-8798.

Birding the site: This route starts at the mostly well-graded dirt road at Latrobe Road's junction with Stone House Road. Within the first mile,

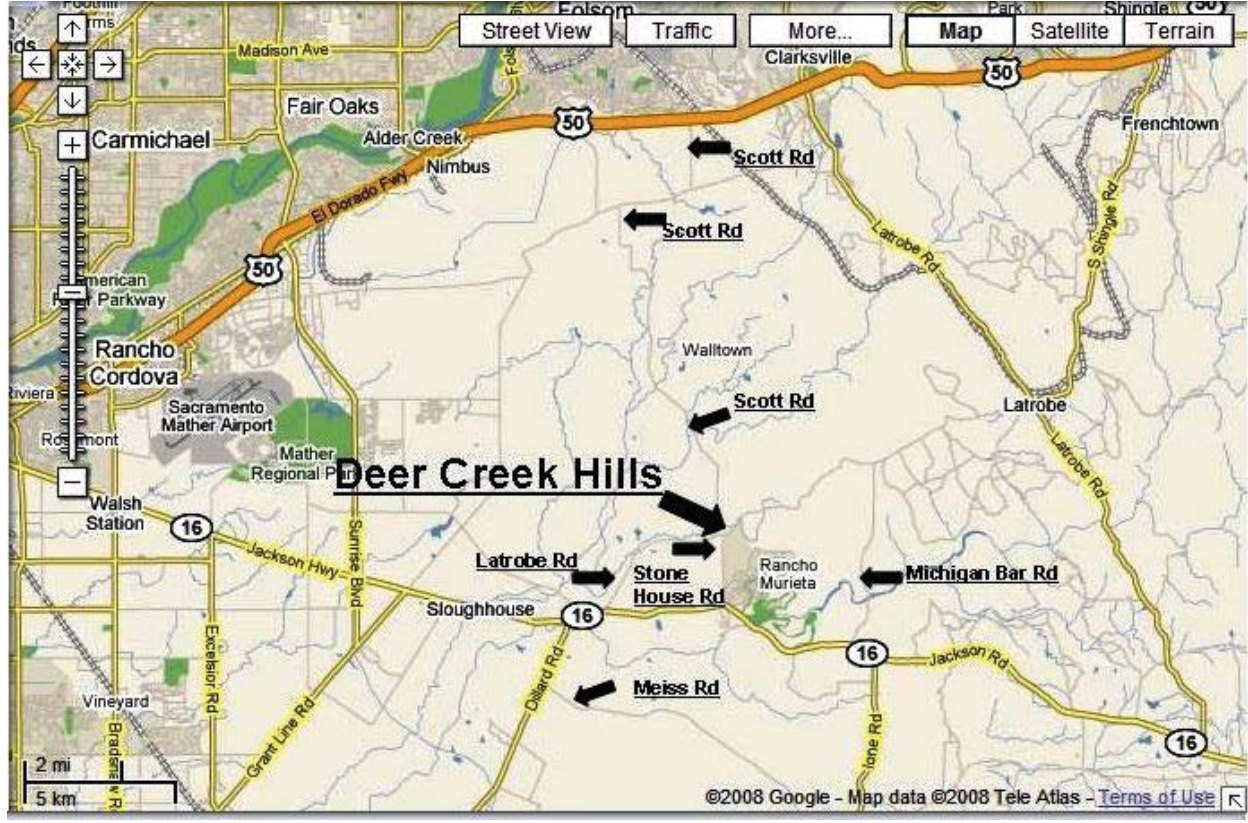
much of the species diversity is encountered, so if you have a passenger car and can only access this section, it is still worth a visit. Lewis's Woodpeckers are often present near this junction and near the second creek crossing, though their numbers vary widely from year to year. At the rocky canyon area at mile 0.4, it is always worth getting out of the car and looking around. This is one of the best places in Sacramento County for Rock Wrens and Rufous-crowned Sparrows away from Folsom Lake.

Typical foothill species such as Western Bluebirds, Lark Sparrows, and Lesser Goldfinches abound. Less commonly, you may encounter a Phainopepla. Lawrence's Goldfinches occur here irregularly in winter, but typically breed in the area in low numbers. If very lucky, you could find Band-tailed Pigeons, a Hairy Woodpecker, Steller's Jays, a Greater Roadrunner, or a Northern Pygmy-Owl. Owling attempts may be rewarded with Lesser Nighthawks, Common Poorwill, Western Screech-Owls, and Great Horned Owls. This area is under-birded and has a lot of potential.

The first creek crossing can usually be negotiated by a passenger car. The second crossing, at mile 1.0, is often flooded, but usually passable in a vehicle with moderate clearance and a driver with a little courage. A third creek crossing is a little rougher than the first, but usually poses no serious obstacle. Be careful and know your car's limits; walking is also an option.

At 2.4 miles, the blue oaks give way to open country with a species mix like that described for Scott Road. Mountain Bluebirds (rare) are sometimes found here. Spring wildflowers are a highlight not to be missed. The road is muddy after a rain and often has large puddles, but is usually passable. It was along this section that the Central Valley's first Cassin's Sparrow was found.

At the junction at mile 4.0, Michigan Bar Road heads to the right (see the next section). If you go straight ahead, Latrobe Road changes to South Shingle Road (the signs are often down or shot). Continuing straight, you travel through similar open country and cross shortly into El Dorado County on a rough and sometimes muddy route. At mile 6.0 you reach pavement and the advance of development which may continue to sprawl all the way to the county line. At mile 8.0, you reach the other Latrobe Road; the name changes are a source of much confusion. After a left turn and another eight miles, you will reach El Dorado Hills and Highway 50.



Sacramento County

Back at mile 4.0, a right turn onto Michigan Bar Road will take you over the Cosumnes River and toward Highway 16 (Jackson Highway). If traveled in reverse, this is an alternate access to the areas above the second crossing of Crevis Creek. See the following section for more details.

Directions: Access 1: From downtown Sacramento (5.3 miles east of Interstate 5), exit Highway 50 at Howe Avenue and head south to Folsom Boulevard. Turn left; then in 0.5 mile, turn right on Jackson Highway (Highway 16). From Folsom Boulevard, it is 13.8 miles to Dillard Road. Continue another 0.8 mile and turn left on Latrobe Road. After 3.3 miles the road becomes dirt at the junction with Stone House Road. Access 2: From the Scott Road exit on Highway 50 near Folsom (23 miles east of downtown Sacramento at Interstate), travel south for 1.6 miles. Turn right on White Rock Road and travel 1.5 miles before turning left on Scott Road. After 8.0 miles, turn left on Latrobe Road. The description above begins with the dirt road (at the junction with Stone House Road) 0.1 mile from the Scott Road junction.

Michigan Bar Road

Here you find a similar mix of habitats and species as described in the previous section, but with the addition of the Cosumnes River.

Birding the site: The area adjacent to the river has the most to offer. Some of Sacramento County's infrequent reports of Hairy Woodpeckers, Steller's Jays, and Band-tailed Pigeons (all rare) are from here. An American Dipper (very rare) has been found here as well, and Lawrence's Goldfinches are sometimes present. Often none of these species is present, but it is always worth a look.

From Highway 16 (Jackson Highway), travel 1.2 miles on Michigan Bar Road to the Cosumnes River. Cross the bridge and park on the far side. From the bridge you can look and listen for a Hairy Woodpecker or Steller's Jay in and around the trees above the residence. Ducks and Canada Geese are often on the river. Please respect the privacy of the property owner.

Beyond the river, the road is unpaved and can be muddy after a storm. Shortly, the blue oak woodland gives way to open grassland. Mountain Bluebirds (rare) have been found in the open country along with winter raptors. Vesper Sparrows and Lawrence's Goldfinches have been seen

Sacramento County

along this stretch. During fall migration, Common Poorwills and Burrowing Owls have been seen on the road after dark. At mile 4.1 you reach the junction with Latrobe Road described in the previous section.

Directions: From Sacramento, exit Highway 50 at Howe Avenue (5.3 miles east of Interstate 5) and head south to Folsom Boulevard. Turn left, then in 0.5 mile turn right on Jackson Highway (Highway 16). From Folsom Boulevard, it is 20 miles to Michigan Bar Road. Turn left on Michigan Bar Road (after passing through Rancho Murieta, 6.3 miles east of Dillard Road).

Meiss Road

Another open country gem, a drive along Meiss Road can produce winter raptors and a species mix similar to Scott Road. In spring and summer, this area has been fairly reliable for Lesser Nighthawks and Grasshopper Sparrows. Meiss Road typically has little traffic, and the eastern 3.3 miles are unpaved but passable in a passenger car. The road runs 7.7 miles from Dillard Road to Lone Road.

Birding the site: The open country is good for raptors and sparrows in winter. Horned Larks abound. In 2005-2008, three or more Common Nighthawks were regularly seen during spring and summer at dusk about three miles from Dillard Road. Lesser Nighthawks breed near the road and are often seen and heard making their trilling calls at dusk from multiple locations. The most reliable area for Grasshopper Sparrows has been around six miles from Dillard Road. They are often heard singing in the grasslands, and are sometimes seen sitting on the fence or up on the vegetation.

Directions: From Sacramento, exit Highway 50 at Howe Avenue (5.3 miles east of Interstate 5) and head south to Folsom Boulevard. Turn left, then in 0.5 mile turn right on Jackson Highway (Highway 16). From Folsom Boulevard, it is 13.8 miles to Dillard Road. Turn right on Dillard Road, go 1.4 miles to Meiss Road and turn left.

From the eastern end of Meiss Road, turning left, it is 4.0 miles on Lone Road to Jackson Highway (only 0.5 mile east of Michigan Bar Road).

Chris Conard