

Folsom Lake Area

is 0.8 mile to the Mormon Island Preserve, 1.0 mile to Shawdownfax Lane, 1.2 miles to the Mormon Island lake access opposite Sophia Parkway, and 2.2 miles to Brown's Ravine.

To reach the Sweetwater Creek area directly, take the El Dorado Hills Boulevard exit (exit 30B) from Highway 50 (29 miles east of Interstate 5). Go north on El Dorado Hills Boulevard for 4.5 miles to Green Valley Road. Continuing straight, the road becomes Salmon Falls Road. From Green Valley Road, it is 2.9 miles to Falcon Crest Lane, 3.8 miles to Sweetwater Creek, and 5.6 miles to the Sweetwater Trail.

Beals Point

Beals Point is probably the single best location for viewing large numbers of gulls and water birds on Folsom Lake. From late October through March, this is usually the best spot to watch thousands of gulls flying in to roost on the lake. Bruce Webb reports that the show usually begins around 3 p.m. and lasts until dusk. Large groups will often stop along the shore, giving you a chance to identify them, before heading out onto the lake to spend the night. As many as 14 Common Loons have been recorded just from this site. Depending on the water levels, you can scan the lake from near the parking area, or you will want to walk up to a quarter-mile down to the waterline. A spotting scope is very helpful. Rock Wrens and Rufous-crowned Sparrows are often seen. The campground area is also worth checking. More information is available at Birding Hotspots of Placer County (placerbirding.com) by Bruce Webb.

Directions: From Sacramento, take Interstate 80 east for 17 miles from Interstate 5 to East Douglas Boulevard (exit 103A). Head east on Douglas for 5.2 miles, and turn right on Auburn Folsom Road. After 1.8 miles, turn left at the Beals Point access.

Alternately, from Highway 50, go east from Interstate 5 in Sacramento for 18.5 miles to the Folsom Boulevard exit (exit 23). Go north for 3.6 miles. At Greenback Avenue the road becomes Folsom Auburn Road. Continue 2.6 miles to the Beals Point access. Note that the road name changes to Auburn Folsom Road once it crosses from Sacramento to Placer County.

Granite Bay Entrance

To reach Beek's Bight, you will go through the Granite Bay entrance (see below). Along the way, you will encounter oak woodland habitat that can

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produce a species list similar to the Beek's Bight area. It is also worthwhile to check the lake for water birds. The shoreline near the boat ramps has produced local rarities such as Snowy Plovers and Sanderlings..

Chris Conard and Kimya Lambert

Beek's Bight

The Beek's Bight area is typical California foothill woodland habitat dominated by interior live oak, gray pine, and blue oak. The spring season provides the greatest diversity. Dozens of migrating and resident hummingbirds can be found feeding on flowers of the snow-drop bush, California buckeye, bush monkey flower, and Indian paint brush. Five species of hummingbirds may be observed, including the Calliope and Costa's.

Birding the site: Granite rock outcroppings prevail throughout and offer excellent habitat for Rock Wrens, Canyon Wrens (uncommon) and Rufous-crowned Sparrows. On the east slope, overlooking Folsom Lake, Common Poorwills have been found nesting. Ash-throated Flycatchers, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Western Kingbirds, Lawrence's Goldfinches (uncommon), Lazuli Buntings, Orange-crowned Warblers, Nashville Warblers and Yellow-breasted Chats head the list of some of the more interesting spring and summer visitors. Western Tanagers have been seen as they pass through on their spring migration to the Sierra. Nesting species include Red-tailed Hawk, Violet-green Swallow, Lesser Goldfinch, Bewick's Wren, Bullock's Oriole, and Oak Titmouse. Lesser Goldfinch nests are often found in the new spring growth of the California buckeye. The nests suffer extensive depredation, but these small passerines have great tenacity—they rebuild and try again. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Chipping Sparrows can be found, especially in spring.



As one works through the area, it is worthwhile to “glass” Folsom Lake itself. The fortunate birder will find Common Loons, Canada Geese, Common Mergansers and Western Grebes. Western Screech-Owls can sometimes be heard at dusk from the Beek’s Bight parking area and along the road back to the Granite Bay entrance. It is possible to find about 80 species of birds in this small area, including Greater Roadrunner (very rare) and Bald Eagle.

The mammal and reptile watching is just as interesting. Fence lizards, whiptails and rattlesnakes are common. Cottontails, jackrabbits, and black-tailed deer are often flushed as you slowly work through the area. If you sit quietly for sustained periods, you may be rewarded with glimpses of California meadow voles and even a coyote. Bobcats have been found in the chamise chaparral not far to the north, which can be reached by following the Pioneer Express Trail that runs above the open grassy area on the far side of the bight. A map available at the park entrance shows this and other trails (the booth is often unstaffed, but the map is available at parks.ca.gov). This same chaparral is excellent habitat for California Thrasher and Wren-tit.

Directions: From Sacramento, take Interstate 80 east for 17 miles from Interstate 5 to East Douglas Boulevard (exit 103A). Head east on Douglas for 6.2 miles to the Granite Bay entrance (\$5-7 depending on season); proceed on the main road along the shoreline for 3.2 miles. For Doton’s Point, almost to the road’s end, turn right and drive another 0.2 mile. Park on your left in the third and largest parking area. Back to the main road, it dead-ends shortly in a parking lot overlooking Beek’s Bight. Following the trail straight ahead will lead to the Pioneer Express Trail.

Alternately, from Highway 50, go east from Interstate 5 in Sacramento for 18.5 miles to the Folsom Boulevard exit (exit 23). Go north for 3.6 miles. At Greenback Avenue the road becomes Folsom Auburn Road. Continue another 4.4 miles to Douglas Boulevard. Note that the road name changes to Auburn Folsom Road once it crosses from Sacramento to Placer County. Turn right on Douglas Boulevard, and go one mile to the Granite Bay entrance (see above).

Tim Fitzer