

### **Woodbridge Ecological Reserve (Isenberg Crane Preserve)**

The most accessible area for observing large numbers of Sandhill Cranes is located just south of Thornton west of Interstate 5. Several roads provide easy access to the fields where the cranes feed and rest and dance. An ecological reserve administered by the California Department of Fish and Game is located on Woodbridge Road. Entrance to the reserve is not allowed, but excellent viewing is available from the parking area that overlooks the reserve.

**Birding the site:** From October through March, many fields in this area contain Sandhill Cranes in varying numbers, with the best time for observation occurring during January, February and March when some fields are flooded, and there are also large numbers of wintering shorebirds and waterfowl. Greatest numbers of Sandhill Cranes are usually along Woodbridge Road. If you are after a species count, give the barnyards along the road a close look. You should find House Finches, crowned sparrows, pheasants, and even a Belted Kingfisher.

Generally, the Sandhill Cranes will first be spotted off in the distance appearing like fence posts or a herd of sheep along the dikes and ditches. Sometimes you may be lucky and find them standing in small groups very near the roadside although generally, they will be further out. In the early spring you can watch them display their courting dance.

The ecological reserve is the best place for a spectacular sight at sunset as the cranes in the thousands return to this area to roost for the night. The reserve is flooded for the cranes to roost with their feet in water to discourage predators. After the hunting season is over and during the period when the fields are flooded for alkali control, there will be thousands of shorebirds, ducks, geese, and swans feeding and resting in the area. During this time, the cranes will be found standing in large groups along the levees and ditch banks.

At the west end, Woodbridge Road dead-ends at the Mokelumne River, so retrace your route back to the highway, turn left and proceed north back to Peltier Road. Turn left (west) on this road for another crane area. At Blossom Road, turn right and look for Cinnamon Teal, Common Moorhens, Pied-billed Grebes, and American Bitterns in the slough. Where Blossom Road intersects the Walnut Grove-Thornton Road, turn left (west) from Blossom onto this road and proceed 3.0 miles to the Staten Island Road and turn left. Large numbers of cranes and other waterbirds may be seen in the flooded fields. Access here is only from

the public road. The end of the public road is clearly marked. There are flooded fields intermittently along the entire length of Walnut Grove-Thornton Road and, depending on the water level, they may be home to thousands of wintering shorebirds and waterfowl. The best time for viewing in this area is November through February.

The only caution for many winter days is the possibility of heavy fog making it almost impossible to see cranes and other wildlife. The state offers guided observation during the height of Sandhill Crane presence, generally on the second Thursdays and Saturdays, and every Sunday of the month from October through the end of February. For specific dates and times, contact the California State Fish and Game Department (916-358-2869 or [dfg.ca.gov/regions/3/cranetour](http://dfg.ca.gov/regions/3/cranetour)).

**Directions:** From Sacramento, take Interstate 5 for 27 miles south of Highway 50. Exit at Peltier Road and turn left, or east, under the freeway. Turn right on the frontage road and proceed south for 2.0 miles. Turn right on Woodbridge Road and drive 2.5 miles west until you see the sign for the reserve and a parking lot/pull-out area on the left.

To reach Staten Island directly, take Interstate 5 for 24 miles south of Highway 50. Exit at Walnut Grove-Thornton Road and go west for 4.0 miles to Staten Island Road and turn left.

*Cecil and Evelyn Smith; updated by Maureen Geiger*



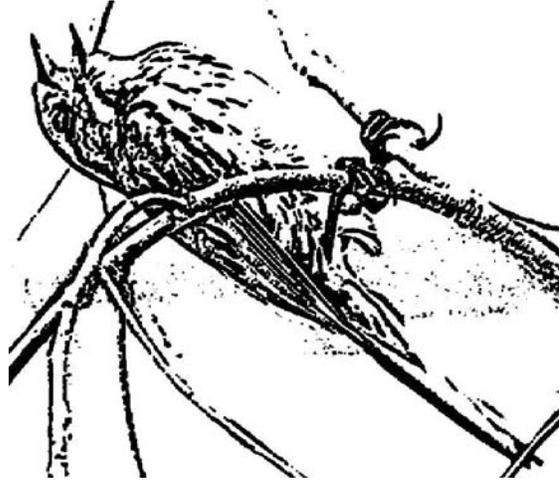
San Joaquin County

**Staten Island** is another excellent site for viewing large numbers of Sandhill Cranes (as is Cosumnes River Preserve), geese, Tundra Swans, other waterfowl, and shorebirds. In spring and summer, the weedy patches can host Blue Grosbeaks. To reach Staten Island, take Interstate 5 south for 24 miles to the Walnut Grove/Thornton exit. Head west for 3.8 miles on Walnut Grove Road. Shortly after crossing the Mokelumne River, turn left on Staten Island Road. Drive only from the road, as the property is a working agricultural operation. Drive south on Staten Island Road until you reach the signs indicating the end of public access.

### **Woodbridge Regional Park**

This park consists of lush riparian woodlands nestled along the south bank of the Mokelumne River in the town of Woodbridge. The canopy is comprised largely of cottonwoods and live oaks. Willows and buckeye are also widespread. The understory includes blackberry brambles and poison oak in many places. Stinging nettle is plentiful also.

**The park has been closed in recent years, but San Joaquin Audubon facilitates monthly visits to the park:** (<http://www.sanjoaquinaudubon.org/trips.htm>).



123

San Joaquin County

### **Lodi Lake**

Lodi Lake Park is truly one of the premier birding areas in San Joaquin County. This reputation is well deserved as nearly 200 species (over 50% of the county's total bird list) have been observed within the boundaries of this 125-acre jewel along the Mokelumne River in north Lodi. Good safety and maintenance, and easy access and observation all help to give the park year-round appeal.

**Birding the site:** Lodi Lake Park attracts primarily riparian and open woodland birds. Despite the presence of the Mokelumne River and the lake, there are no true wetlands within the park. Bird groups such as waterfowl, divers, shorebirds, terns and rails are not to be expected in any kind of numbers either as residents or migrants. However, there are enough marginal wetlands present so that with the rich riparian woodland present, one can almost expect any bird found within the Central Valley at the proper season.

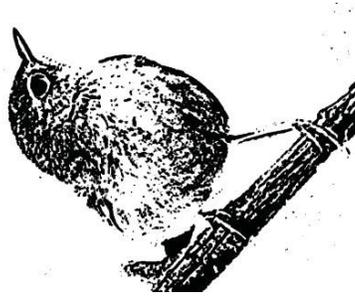
The mature trees and lawn area at the park entrance and along Laurel Avenue attract a wide variety of birds all year long. Residents include Mourning Dove, Anna's Hummingbird (check the feeders along Laurel Avenue), Nuttall's and Downy Woodpeckers; Black Phoebe, Western Scrub Jay, Oak Titmouse, Bushitt, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brewer's Blackbird, House Finch, and both Lesser and American Goldfinches. During both periods of migration, nearly every species of warbler can be found, including Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow, Black-throated Gray, Townsend's, Hermit, and Wilson's. Other migrants to be expected include Warbling Vireo, Western Tanager, and Black-headed Grosbeak. Spring arrivals that stay to nest in this area include Black-chinned Hummingbird; Barn, Northern Rough-winged, and Tree Swallows, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Bullock's Oriole. Birds that arrive in fall that spend the winter include Red-breasted Nuthatch (rare), Cedar Waxwing, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and both White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows.

When the lake is drawn down from October to March, the diversity can be quite high, especially in late fall and early winter. One can expect American White Pelican (rare), Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Green-winged Teal, Common Merganser, Killdeer, Black-necked Stilt, Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Dunlin, Long-billed Dowitcher, and California and Ring-billed Gulls.

124



The highlight of the park is the Nature Area on the eastern side of the park. As one walks toward this area, there is a picnic site on the left that is surrounded by a wall of cottonwoods on one side and a thick row of blackberry brambles on another. The picnic area serves as a good introduction to the Nature Area since the birds, both in numbers and diversity, become instantly apparent here. The entire footpath in the Nature Area has a series of markers numbered 1 through 23. While birds can be seen at any given point within the Nature Area, there are several spots that tend to be more productive than others, particularly numbers 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15 and 18.



In addition to all of the woodland birds mentioned earlier, the following can also be expected. Residents include Red-shouldered and Cooper's Hawks, Great Horned Owl, Belted Kingfisher; Bewick's and House Wrens, Hutton's Vireo (rare), Common Yellowthroat, Spotted Towhee, Song Sparrow, and Red-winged Blackbird. California Quail and Wren-tit used to be resident, but that status appears to now be in question. However, both can still be seen or heard on occasion. During periods of migration, the entire area can become alive with migrants. In addition to the previously mentioned warblers, both MacGillivray's and Yellow-breasted Chat can be found. Flycatchers can abound, including Olive-sided (rare), Western Wood-Pewee, Willow, Hammond's, Dusky (rare), Pacific-slope, and Western Kingbird. Other goodies to be expected are Vaux's Swift, Rufous Hummingbird, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Swainson's Thrush (regular in spring, very rare in fall), Cassin's Vireo, Lazuli Bunting, Chipping Sparrow, and Hooded Oriole. Birds that appear in the fall and often remain through the winter include Winter Wren (rare), Golden-crowned Kinglet; Hermit and Varied Thrushes; Fox, Lincoln's and White-throated Sparrows (rare), Purple Finch (rare) and Pine Siskin.

## San Joaquin County

Pig's Lake, at the east end of the Nature Area, is one of the best spots to observe the beautiful Wood Duck up close, particularly during fall and winter. Other species that can be observed at the pond include Green Heron, Great Egret and Great Blue Heron. Occasionally, a Common Moorhen can be found. About one-half of the turtles at Pig's Lake are western pond turtles (native) and one-half are red-eared slider (introduced).

The park is open to the public every day of the year. The general use area around the lake is not enclosed. The Nature Area has a series of trails throughout with at least one paved path. This area is enclosed by a fence and is usually opened at sunrise and closed at sunset. Watch out for poison oak on some of the side trails. Public restroom stalls are available in the general use area. The topography of the park is totally flat. The dirt paths in the Nature Area are very well maintained, allowing safe passage during the entire year for people of all ages and abilities.

**Directions:** Lodi Lake Park is on the north side of Turner Road in north Lodi. From Sacramento, take Interstate 5 for 30 miles south of Highway 50. Exit at Turner Road and head east for 5.8 miles to Laurel Avenue and turn left (if coming from Highway 99, it is 1.6 miles to Laurel Avenue via Turner Road). There is no fee to enter the park, but there is a parking fee if you drive in. Most birders traditionally park on Laurel Avenue, immediately east of the park entrance, and walk in.

David Yee

*From Birding In and Around San Joaquin County (2002), courtesy of David Yee and San Joaquin Audubon Society.*

