

Solano County

Lake Solano Park

This magnet for birds on the Solano-Yolo County line is formed by a small diversion dam on Putah Creek several miles east of Lake Berryessa and the Vaca Mountains, the eastern-most ridge of the North Coast Ranges. There are several productive areas to bird including the Lake Solano Park campground and day-use area on the west end and the wide, open water along Putah Creek Road at the eastern end of the Lake just below the dam. Riparian habitat, adjacent farmland, open fields, and the lake and Putah Creek provide attractive habitat for a wide variety of bird species. For best birding, visit the area early in the morning; fall and winter are most productive, due to the arrival of winter visitors.

Birding the site: On the drive to the lake, check the orchards for mixed flocks gleaming remnants of the walnut harvest. Large flocks of Wild Turkey have also been seen in these orchards. In spring and summer, along Covell Boulevard, look for Swainson's Hawks which often feed in the open fields as well as other birds of prey. In the winter, check plowed fields for Mountain Plovers; you may get lucky. Check American Robin flocks for a possible Varied Thrush.

As you approach the lake, there is a small parking lot on the left at the dam, but as this lot is posted "No Parking," continue a bit further until you reach a larger parking lot at the base of a long line of cliffs on the left. Check the cliffs for Great Horned Owls roosting in some of the caves and the brushy cliff-sides for Wrentits, year-round, and Hermit Thrush in winter.

The lake provides habitat for numerous migrating wading birds and waterfowl. In winter, this is one of the best places for Hooded Mergansers and Osprey. Check the far shoreline for shorebirds, and the near shoreline for wrens, towhees and sparrows. Watch for river otters which are fairly common. Osprey and Phainopepla may be present in the trees across the river. It is easy to spend an hour or more here depending on the bird population on the lake. A scope is very helpful.

Leave the parking area and drive west about one mile and turn right onto Pleasants Valley Road. Drive three-quarters of a mile to the park entrance. There is a parking lot on the right. This is a good spot for lunch with picnic tables, restrooms, and big deciduous trees providing shade in the summer. If you missed the Hooded Mergansers at your first stop, they can often be found here. This is also a nice spot for a short

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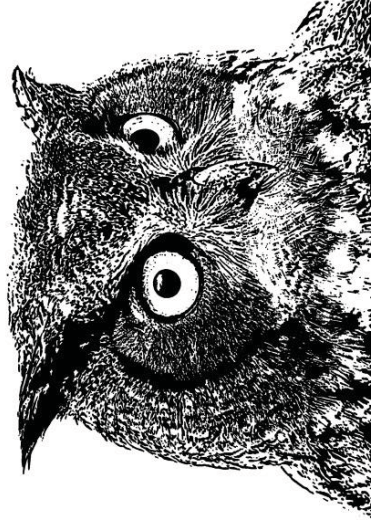
walk along the creek with good birding including a possible Red-breasted Sapsucker, Phainopeplas, and recently, a Pileated Woodpecker (check the Central Valley Bird Club listserv for recent reports: groups.yahoo.com/group/central_valley_birds). The park is generally crowded late spring to early fall.

You can walk across the road to the campground, and a stroll through these sites may also be productive. Vegetation is denser, and warblers, vireos and other songbirds may be found here during migration. Brown Creepers are often found here in winter, and Hermit Thrush numbers can be astounding.

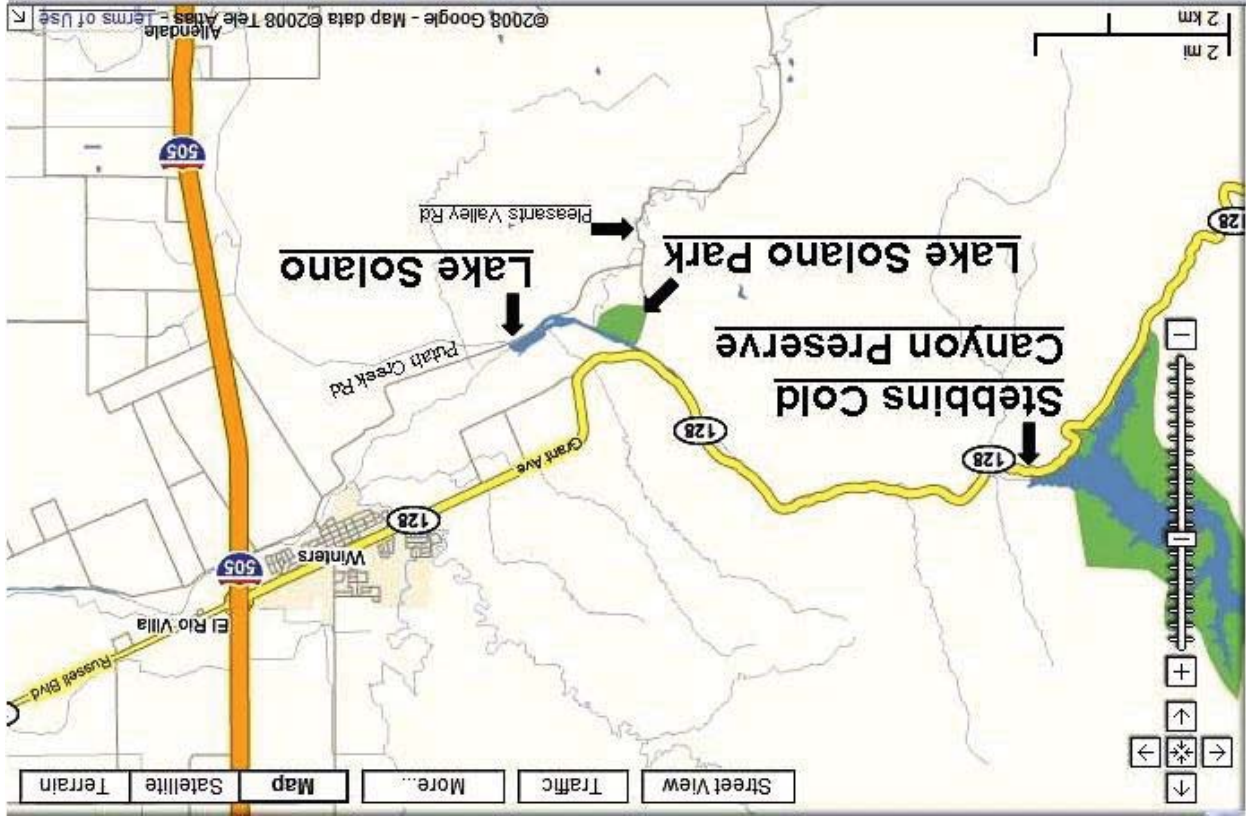
Directions: From Sacramento, take Interstate 80 west (about 14.5 miles west of Interstate 5) and go north on Highway 113. In 2.8 miles, exit at Covell Boulevard, turning left over the freeway. Continue west for 12 miles to Winters, passing the 505 freeway, where the road becomes Highway 128. Turn left onto Railroad Avenue, cross the bridge over Putah Creek and turn right onto Putah Creek Road. Continue west on Putah Creek Road, which roughly follows Putah Creek through farmland and orchards. It is 3.8 miles from the bridge to the large parking area at Lake Solano.

To reach Lake Solano Park, continue on Putah Creek Road to Pleasants Valley Road. Turn right and go 0.8 mile to the park entrance on your right. This is a fee area, and rangers are enthusiastic about giving tickets to those who do not pay. Also, do not park at the campground unless you are intending to camp, since the staff there is extremely vigilant.

June C. Persson



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Cold Canyon and the G.I. Stebbins Reserve

The Stebbins Cold Canyon Reserve is a beautiful birding area which draws some bird species unique to the Sacramento checklist area (see RESOURCES). The canyon itself is densely vegetated, and the predominant species are typical of riparian oak and scrub woodland including interior, live and blue oaks, buckeyes, chamise, cottonwoods, coyote brush, manzanita and toyons. The canyon is a wonderland of wildflowers in April and May. Near the top is a blend zone of coastal and valley vegetation. The reserve is owned and managed by the University of California at Davis as a research area and is currently open to the public from sunrise to sunset. Visitors are asked to stay on the trails; abuse could cause closure—as an incentive to stay on the trail, deer ticks and poison oak are common, as are Pacific rattlesnakes, especially near the Homestead.

Birding the site: As you approach the mountains on Highway 128, check the skies above for hawks, falcons, and possibly a Golden Eagle and the fields and fences for Western Bluebirds. In spring, the fields are covered with flowers, mainly lupine and California poppies. The valley oaks here are always a treat.

As you begin your hike, continue straight ahead approximately 100 yards to the entry of the Stebbins Preserve. There is a large kiosk and map of the area as well as trail guides and a place to sign in. Be sure to sign in and out and follow all the posted rules. The trail parallels and soon crosses Cold Creek. The creek is not perennial so the only time you may have trouble crossing is in the spring when water is rushing toward Putah Creek. Continue up canyon through rather dense vegetation, and the trail will open to a grassy clearing with wonderful views of the coastal mountains on both sides. Along the upper end of the trail, pay close attention for the calls of Mountain Quail. Just past the clearing is a densely shaded area called the Homestead where remnants of an early dwelling can be found. The trail for our purposes ends in these trees. Above this is private property.

Any season can be rewarding. The best time to visit is early in the morning as even in the spring and fall, this canyon can be hot. The trail is moderately steep and rocky in many places and may not be suitable for some birders with disabilities.

Resident species include Cooper's and Red-tailed Hawks, Golden Eagles, Mountain Quail, Western Screech-Owls, Great Horned Owls,

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Northern Pygmy-Owls, White-throated Swifts, Anna's Hummingbirds, Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Black Phoebe, Western Scrub-Jay and Steller's Jays, Oak Titmice, Bush-tits, Bewick's Wrens, Rock and Canyon Wrens (near the creek), Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Wrentits (their ping pong call often heard), California Thrashers (usually singing), Hutton's Vireo, California and Spotted Towhees, Rufous-crowned and Sage Sparrows.

In summer, expect Black-headed Grosbeaks, Lazuli Buntings, Common Poorwills (before daybreak), Bullock's Orioles and several species of swallows.

In winter, expect Sharp-shinned Hawks, Varied Thrushes, and crowned sparrows. Long-eared Owls and Northern Saw-whet Owls have been recorded. Spring is one of the best times, and you can expect flycatchers, hummingbirds, warblers, vireos and Western Tanagers along with the year-round residents.

Whether or not you hike up the canyon, a great place for a picnic lunch is below the dam. After crossing Putah Creek on Highway 128 coming from the east, drive into the lower parking lot and walk toward Putah Creek. This is a good spot to listen for Canyon Wrens across the creek and for occasional Rock Wrens. Rufous-crowned Sparrows have been found in this location.



Also keep your eyes open for a Northern Pygmy-Owl which frequents the south side of the creek close to the dam. A great time to see this bird is in the winter when the leaves are off the trees. Once a Pygmy-Owl entertained a group from Sacramento Audubon sitting only 20 feet away on an open branch, ignoring its observers, then plunging into the grass below and coming up with a mouse! The mouse was almost as big as the owl!

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An American Dipper may be found sporadically in winter on Putah Creek from the dam to downstream of the Highway 128 bridge—often just below the bridge.

As you leave the parking area, drive around the curve west on Highway 128 to the top of the dam for a view of Lake Berryessa. Watch for Western and Clark's Grebes on the lake and look overhead for White-throated Swifts, Turkey Vultures, hawks, falcons, and a possible Golden Eagle.

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Just past this bridge and below the dam, there is a large dirt parking lot on the right. There is a small parking lot immediately across the road from this lot which is also open to the public. There is another smaller parking area on the right about 1,000 feet further on and almost directly across from the entrance to Cold Canyon. This is a dangerous pedestrian crossing as it is on a hairpin turn. BE CAREFUL and listen for the traffic!!

June C. Persson

