

Foothills and the Sierra Nevada

The Coloma Area

East of Sacramento between Placerville and Auburn, along Highway 49 in and near Coloma are four excellent areas for birding and hiking: the Cronan Ranch Regional Trails Park, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Greenwood Unit, the Marshall Gold Discovery Historic State Park, and the Dave Moore Nature Area.

Birding the sites: Helping to ensure a good variety of species, these four areas represent a broad mix of habitats, including oak woodland, rolling grasslands, chaparral and coniferous forest, streamside riparian areas and open water. Likely species will depend on the time of year you visit. Some of the oak woodland species to be found in the appropriate season are Cooper's Hawk, Band-tailed Pigeon, Acorn Woodpecker, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Oak Titmouse, Bushtit, House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Western Bluebird, Hutton's Vireo, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Western Tanager and Bullock's Oriole. Wrentits are heard on the trails throughout the park and at Cronan Ranch. On the river, you may find Common Mergansers and Pied-billed Grebes, with Tree Swallows overhead.

Streamside woodland birds include White-tailed Kite, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Warbling Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak and American Goldfinch.

Specialties include Yellow-breasted Chats at the Greenwood Unit and a variety of nesting raptors, particularly at Cronan Ranch.

The Coloma area, with elevations between 750-1,000-plus feet, can be very hot in summer; more comfortable temperatures occur in fall, winter and spring. Poison oak is abundant, and rattlesnakes, bears and cougars are present in the area.

Cronan Ranch Regional Trails Park

The BLM manages the recently-acquired Cronan Ranch, originally a working cattle ranch of approximately 1,452 acres. This beautiful area contains 12 miles of dirt roads and trails ambling through a variety of terrain from oak woodland and rolling hills to shaded, riparian river access. A flyer at the trailhead provides background on this area and a trail map. Portable toilets are found in the parking lot with several others along the river.

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A 3.7 mile trail leads from the parking area to the river and back, passing several habitats and producing a variety of species. In spring, the open grasslands are rich with many nesting Lazuli Buntings and possible rarities such as Grasshopper Sparrow and Tricolored Blackbirds. Northern Rough-winged Swallows fly low over the trails and parking area, and Rufous-crowned Sparrows nest in the riparian area approaching the river. Bullock's Orioles and Ash-throated Flycatchers are numerous and can be heard calling from many of the trees in the grasslands and along the river.

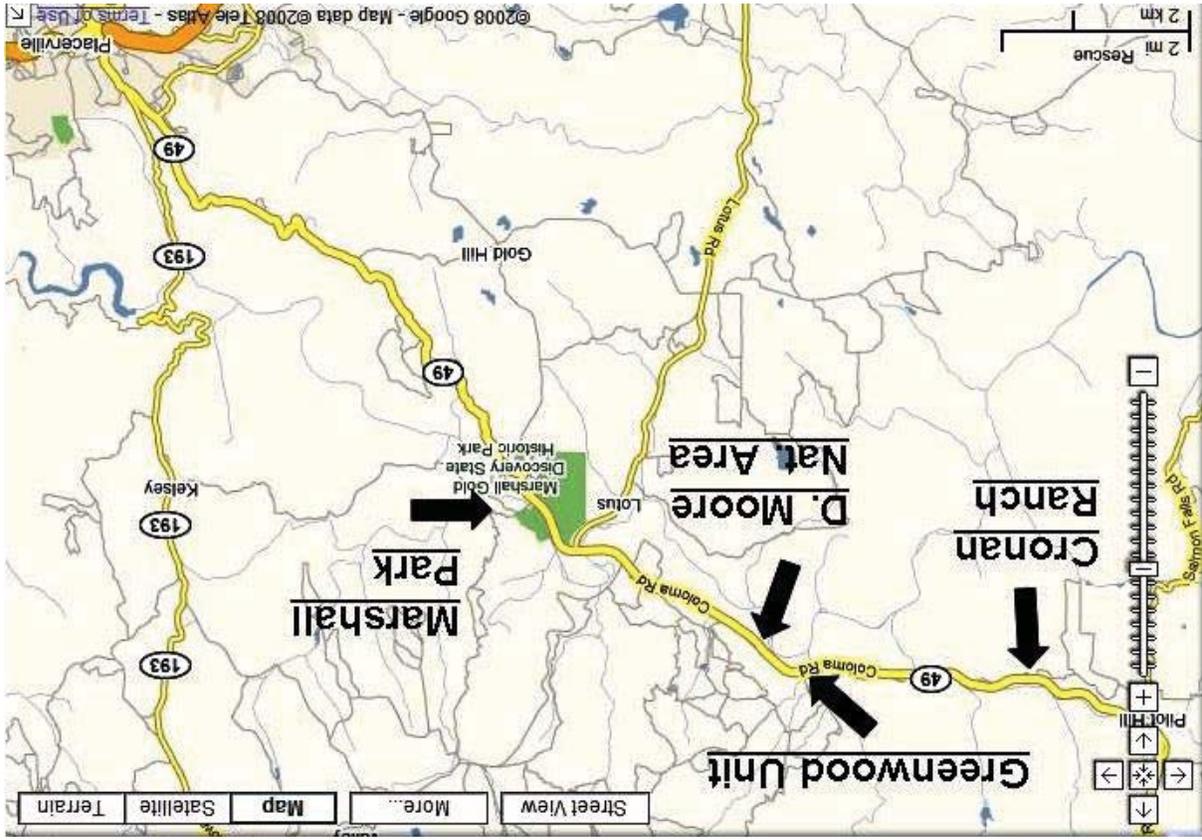
Directions: To reach Cronan Ranch, take Highway 50 to the Ponderosa Road exit (exit 37) at Shingle Springs. Cross over the freeway and turn right onto North Shingle Road. North Shingle becomes Green Valley Road, then, in about 4.5 miles, it becomes Lotus Road. Continue on Lotus for another 7 miles to Highway 49. Turn left onto 49 (toward Auburn), continue about 6 miles, passing the Magnolia Ranch parking area on the left and a small winery on the right. Turn left at the second left turn sign after the winery onto Pedro Hills Road where you will find a large parking area. Both lots provide access to the series of trails which run between the Greenwood Unit and Cronan Ranch.

Long-term plans are for the trails in Cronan Ranch and Greenwood Creek to connect with the South Fork American River trail system all the way to Salmon Falls above Folsom Lake.

Greenwood Unit

The BLM also manages this area between the Marshall Gold Park and the Cronan Ranch property. This is a particularly good place to look for nesting raptors such as Great Horned Owls, American Kestrels, Red-shouldered Hawks and White-tailed Kites. Within the unit, several excellent trails follow the South Fork of the American River and meander through shady oak woodland and occasionally, open rolling grasslands.

Directions: To reach the Greenwood Unit, take Highway 50 to the Ponderosa Road exit (exit 37) at Shingle Springs. Cross over the freeway and turn right onto North Shingle Road. North Shingle becomes Green Valley Road, then, in about 4.5 miles, it becomes Lotus Road. Continue on Lotus for another 7 miles to Highway 49. Turn left onto 49 (toward Auburn), continue north a little over 3 miles, passing the Mother Lode River Center on the left and crossing Greenwood Creek via a small bridge. Shortly after the creek, just beyond a "River Access" sign, turn left into a paved parking area. There is a permanent restroom in the lot and an organic toilet along the trail at about 1.5 miles.



Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park

This historic park celebrates the discovery of gold at Coloma in 1848. You may want to visit the museum and the many buildings and displays relating to this important period in California history. Also worthwhile is a visit to the nature center located at 348 Highway 49 just east of the museum parking lot. In addition to the exhibits and nature-related items, the center is the headquarters for the American River Conservancy, a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting open space in El Dorado County.

Clearly marked on park maps are several hikes both long and short which lead along the South Fork of the American River and through typical foothill woodlands.

Directions: From Sacramento, take Highway 50 to the Ponderosa Road exit (exit 37) at Shingle Springs. Cross over the freeway and turn right onto North Shingle Road. North Shingle becomes Green Valley Road, then, in about 4.5 miles, it becomes Lotus Road. Continue on Lotus for another 7 miles to Highway 49. Turn right onto 49 and proceed to the park. The \$5 entrance fee per vehicle can be paid at the museum on the right side of Highway 49 as you enter the park.

Dave Moore Nature Area

This nature area features a loop trail about a mile long which goes from the parking lot to the South Fork of the American River and back to the parking area. About half of this trail is fully accessible to people with wheelchairs, walkers and strollers. It is fairly level with little elevation change and is thus excellent for children as well. There are picnic tables and wheelchair-accessible restrooms near the parking lot.

Directions: To reach the nature area, take Highway 50 to the Ponderosa Road exit (exit 37) at Shingle Springs. Cross over the freeway and turn right onto North Shingle Road. North Shingle becomes Green Valley Road, then, in about 4.5 miles, it becomes Lotus Road. Continue on Lotus for another 7 miles to Highway 49. Turn left onto 49 (toward Auburn), drive north about 1.3 miles and turn left between a pair of large stone entrance walls into the parking area.

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