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# Pocket Guide to Birds of the Sierra Nevada Foothills

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*A project of PRBO Conservation Science*



# Pocket Guide to Birds of the Sierra Nevada Foothills

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PRBO Conservation Science

California Partners In Flight

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*Cover photos:* Western Bluebird (front), Northern Flicker (back), both by Martin Meyers.

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# **Introduction**

The foothills of the western slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains (hereafter, Foothills) are comprised of diverse habitat types and bird species. Some of the more dominant habitats include: oak woodland, oak-pine woodland, chaparral, and riparian. These habitats are all an integral part of the landscape and support essential plant and animal life. While some of the bird species are strictly associated with a particular habitat type, others can be found in almost all habitats. Here, we provide an introduction to the most common birds in the Foothills, and provide suggestions for their conservation.

## **How to Use this Guide**

This guide was written for anyone interested in learning about the most common bird species in the Foothills. We focus on 66 species, and separate them according to where they place their nests – different bird species select different locations within a habitat to build their nests and raise young. Some species in the guide do not nest in the Foothills, but are in-

cluded in the section where they are most commonly found. Within each section, species are listed in taxonomic order. Categories are divided as follows:

- 1) **Understory, shrub and ground nesters and dwellers**
- 2) **Midstory nesters and dwellers,**
- 3) **Canopy nesters and dwellers, and**
- 4) **Cavity nesters** and non-traditional nesters (such as nests on cliffs, streamside banks, eaves, or other human-made structures).

Use the photographs to identify the different bird species you see, and read about their habitat needs. Note the simple actions that you can take to make your land a better home for birds. Even small changes can make a big difference in birds' lives!

## **Species Profiles**

Each species profile includes a photo. An attempt was made to include photos of birds in plumage typical of how they usually look while in the Foothills (some birds appear different depending on



their age, sex or on the time of the year).

Each species profile includes the following:

- 1) **Identification:** An overview of important physical features or behavioral clues that help identify a particular species, including its length in inches. We note when males and females or different age classes look different.
- 2) **Timing:** When the species occurs in the Foothills.  
*Note:* “Winter” is defined as birds that arrive in the fall and stay until spring, but do not breed here during the summer months.
- 3) **Diet:** Main food items.
- 4) **Conservation:** Describes specific ways you can help to conserve birds and their habitats. Plant names are listed in Latin (spp. = species).

This is not a comprehensive guide to birds of the Foothills, but an introduction to the species, their habitats and how to conserve them. References are listed at the end of this guide.

## Understory, Shrub, and Ground Nesters and Dwellers

Understory and shrubby vegetation provides protection and food resources for a variety of bird species. A healthy understory (low-growing plants) is a critical component of healthy forest and shrub habitats in the Foothills. While some birds require large contiguous blocks of dense shrubs, others require dense patches of shrubs interspersed with openings.



Understory = the underlying layer of vegetation.

## Understory Habitat Improvement Tips

- Plant clumps of low-growing shrubs and forbs that are native to your region. Some plants provide shelter and nesting substrate, while others provide berries, seeds, and nectar for a variety of bird species. Although appropriate natives for your yard depend on your region and the habitat where you live, some native understory plants include: *Artemisia* spp., *Ceanothus* spp., *Cercis occidentalis*, *Epilobium californica*, *Fremontodendron californicum*, *Rhamnus crocea*.
- Protect large areas of native chaparral and shrubland, and manage for a mix of dense and open areas.
- Do not mow during the nesting season, to avoid destroying ground and low nests (March–August).
- Plant armored vegetation like buckbrush (*Ceanothus cuneatus*), to help protect nesting birds from predators.
- Allow the understory to connect with the midstory story, to help enhance habitat structure.



Rick Lewis

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## California Quail

(*Callipepla californica*)

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**Identification:** 10" – Chunky with black plume on forehead. Gray-brown, scaled belly. Often in groups. *Male* (shown): White-bordered black face and throat. *Female*: Brown overall with shorter plumes.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Seeds, leaves.

**Conservation:** Plant dense clumps of shrubs and trees. Use native vegetation such as *Rubus ursinus* (California blackberry), *Ceanothus* shrubs, oaks, and native grasses.



Eric Preston

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## Turkey Vulture

(*Cathartes aura*)

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**Identification:** 26" – Blackish-brown overall, unfeathered red head. In flight, underwings two-toned (light hindwing).

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Carrion.

**Conservation:** Maintain a mix of forested and open habitat for foraging and retain large native trees in areas away from human activities for communal roost sites.



Eric Preston

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## Northern Harrier

(*Circus cyaneus*)

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**Identification:** 18" – Long wings and tail. White rump patch in flight. *Male:* Upperparts gray. *Female:* Upperparts brown, underparts boldly streaked. *Young:* Like female, but rusty below.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Small mammals, reptiles.

**Conservation:** Northern Harriers nest on the ground in tall grassy areas and are sensitive to disturbance. Maintain unmowed open habitats that have enough cover for prey species.



Steve Smith

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## Greater Roadrunner

(*Geococcyx californianus*)

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**Identification:** 23" – Distinctive. Large and long-tailed. Streaked overall, crest often raised.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Invertebrates, small reptiles, birds, eggs, carrion, plant material.

**Conservation:** Protect habitat that has a mix of open habitat for foraging and dense shrub cover for nesting.



Eric Preston

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## Wrentit

(*Chamaea fasciata*)

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**Identification:** 7" – Skulks through dense shrubs. Long tail often held askew to the body. Upperparts brown, underparts pinkish-brown.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, spiders, fruit, seeds, other plant matter.

**Conservation:** Maintain large areas with diverse and dense shrub cover and protect shrub corridors that connect habitat fragments.





Martin Meyers

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## California Thrasher

(*Toxostoma redivivum*)

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**Identification:** 12" – Long down-curved bill. Long tail. Light brown upperparts, buffy underparts.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, other arthropods, fruit.

**Conservation:** California Thrashers are only found in the foothills of California and coastal scrub of California and Baja, Mexico. Preservation of dense and diverse shrub habitat is essential for this species.



Peter LaTourrette

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## Yellow-breasted Chat

(*Icteria virens*)

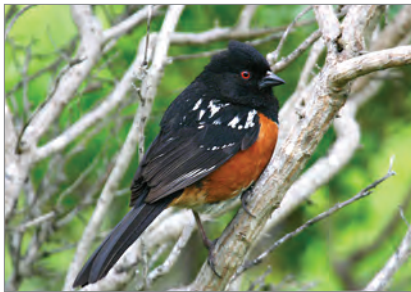
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**Identification:** 8" – White “spectacles” on face. Throat and chest yellow, belly white. Upperparts grayish olive.

**Timing:** Summer.

**Diet:** Insects, berries.

**Conservation:** Wherever possible, widen creekside (riparian) vegetation corridors by planting clumps of shrubs and trees. Use native vegetation such as *Salix* spp. (willows) and *Rubus ursinus* (California blackberry).



Rick Lewis

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## Spotted Towhee

(*Pipilo maculatus*)

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**Identification:** 9" – *Male* (shown): Head, chest, and upperparts black, sides rusty. Red eyes, white spotting on wing, long black tail. *Female*: Grayish brown where male is black.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds, berries.

**Conservation:** Create travel corridors by connecting patches of vegetation along streamside (riparian) and maintain dense patches of shrubs.



Tom Grey

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## California Towhee

(*Pipilo crissalis*)

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**Identification:** 9" – Uniformly grayish-brown with cinnamon undertail feathers. Long tail. Often seen foraging on the ground.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Seeds, some insects.

**Conservation:** Plant native shrub species and protect chaparral and streamside (riparian) habitats.



Martin Meyers

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## Rufous-crowned Sparrow

(*Aimophila ruficeps*)

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**Identification:** 6" – Crown rusty, upperparts grayish brown, often with rusty streaks. Gray “eyebrow.” Black and white mustache. Gray underparts.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Seeds, other plant material, insects.

**Conservation:** Maintain dense shrub habitat interspersed with open rocky areas on your land.



Martin Meyers

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## Black-chinned Sparrow

(*Spizella atrogularis*)

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**Identification:** 6" – Gray head and underparts. Pink bill. Brownish streaked back. *Adult* (shown): Black patch surrounding bill.

**Timing:** Summer.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds, grass, forbs.

**Conservation:** Black-chinned Sparrows are relatively uncommon in the Foothills and of conservation interest. Preserve low-growing shrub habitat.



Steve Smith

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## Lark Sparrow

(*Chondestes grammacus*)

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**Identification:** 7" – Bold white, black, and chestnut (or brown on young birds) head pattern. White outer tail feathers. Whitish breast with dark central spot.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds.

**Conservation:** Maintain areas of open woodland and grassland and avoid activities that disturb ground nests (Mar.–Aug.), such as mowing and off-trail recreation.

Peter LaTourrette



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**(Bell's) Sage Sparrow**  
(*Amphispiza belli*)

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**Identification:** 6" – Dark gray head with bold white moustache. White breast with dark central spot. Often on ground with tail raised.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, spiders, seeds, fruit, plant material.

**Conservation:** Plant native shrubs and maintain dense shrub patches.





Eric Preston

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## Song Sparrow

(*Melospiza melodia*)

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**Identification:** 6" – Upperparts reddish brown with dark streaking. Gray face with brown stripes. Underparts whitish with heavy streaking.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds.

**Conservation:** Avoid brush clearing during the breeding season (Mar.–Aug.), and maintain lush, dense streamside and wetland areas.



Eric Preston

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## White-crowned Sparrow

(*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

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**Identification:** 7" – Streaky brown upperparts, plain gray underparts. *Adult* (shown): Black and white crown stripes. *Young*: Brown crown stripes.

**Timing:** Winter.

**Diet:** Seeds, buds, grass, fruits, arthropods.

**Conservation:** After tree and shrub trimming in the fall, leave brush piles and a mix of shrub and open grassy areas, which provide cover and foraging habitat.



Rick Lewis

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## Golden-crowned Sparrow

(*Zonotrichia atricapilla*)

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**Identification:** 7" – Yellow fore-crown surrounded by black or brown stripes (varies by age and time of year). Underparts grayish, streaky brownish upper-parts.

**Timing:** Winter.

**Diet:** Seeds, fruit, buds, flowers, arthropods.

**Conservation:** After tree and shrub trimming in the fall, leave brush piles and a mix of shrub and open grassy areas, which provide cover and foraging habitat.



Rick Lewis

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## Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco

(*Junco hyemalis*)

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**Identification:** 6" – Head light brownish-gray to glossy black. Bill pink. White outer tail feathers. Pinkish-brown sides.

**Timing:** Winter.

**Diet:** Seeds, arthropods, fruit.

**Conservation:** Maintain areas of open woodland and grassland for foraging.



Martin Meyers

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## Lazuli Bunting

(*Passerina amoena*)

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**Identification:** 6" – *Male* (shown): Head and upperparts turquoise blue. Chest cinnamon, underparts white. Two white wingbars. *Female*: Upperparts grayish-brown, underparts paler. Two pale wingbars.

**Timing:** Summer.

**Diet:** Seeds, insects.

**Conservation:** Plant and maintain a diverse mix of low-growing shrubs and herbaceous vegetation.



Rich Stallcup

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## Red-winged Blackbird

(*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

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**Identification:** 9" – *Male* (shown): Black overall with a bright red patch on each shoulder. *Female*: Brown overall with dark streaking on underparts.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds.

**Conservation:** Maintain native shrub habitat adjacent to creeks and dense wetland herbaceous vegetation, such as *Typha* spp. (cattails).



Steve Smith

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## Western Meadowlark

(*Sturnella neglecta*)

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**Identification:** 9.5" – Bright yellow underparts, black breast band. White outer tail feathers.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Seeds, insects.

**Conservation:** Support projects that promote grassland restoration and avoid ground disturbing activities during the nesting season (Mar.–Aug.).

## Midstory Nesters and Dwellers

Most midstory nesters and dwellers in the Foothills can be found in oak, oak-pine, and riparian habitats. The midstory grows in the shadows of tall trees, and provides shade to understory plants. Many midstory nesters make open-cup nests and place them in tall shrubs or small trees where they are well concealed from predators.



Midstory = the section of vegetation in a forest with more than one vertical layer.



## Midstory Habitat Improvement Tips

- Plant clumps of tall-growing shrubs and low-growing trees that are native to your region.
- Add native fruit-bearing plants to your planting mix, such as *Rhamnus crocea*, *R. californica*, and *Sambucus mexicana*.
- Allow the midstory to connect with other forest layers to enhance habitat structure.
- Trim vegetation during the non-nesting season (Sept.–Feb.), to avoid disturbance to nesting birds.
- Plant a diversity of native flowering plants such as *Epilobium californica* and *Cercis occidentalis*, to attract hummingbirds and other pollinators to your yard.
- Promote oak regeneration and health.
- Other native plants, such as *Calycanthus occidentalis*, *Ceanothus* spp., and *Arctostaphylos* spp. can help contribute to a healthy midstory layer. See native plants listed on page 9 for suggestions of species that may promote a healthy midstory.



Steve Smith

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## Mourning Dove

(*Zenaida macroura*)

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**Identification:** 12" – Pinkish brown overall. Black spots on wings and single spot on each cheek. Long pointed tail, tail feathers tipped white.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Seeds.

**Conservation:** Avoid mowing, clearing brush and pruning trees in the breeding season (Mar.–Aug.).



Rick Lewis

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## Anna's Hummingbird

(*Calypte anna*)

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**Identification:** 4" – Upperparts green, underparts grayish. *Male* (left): Iridescent rose-pink crown and throat. *Female* (right): Throat with lines of spots or a small patch of pink.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Nectar, insects.

**Conservation:** Plant flowering plants native to your region, such as *Epilobium californica* and *Cercis occidentalis*.

Rich Stallcup



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**Western Scrub-jay**  
(*Aphelocoma californica*)

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**Identification:** 12" – Head and upperparts blue with blackish mask bordered above by white. Underparts grayish.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, acorns, other seeds, berries.

**Conservation:** Avoid clearing brush and pruning trees during the breeding season (Mar.–Aug.).



Martin Meyers

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## Bushtit

(*Psaltirparus minimus*)

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**Identification:** 5" – Grayish overall, underparts paler, long tail. Very active. Often seen in flocks. *Male and Young* (shown): Brown eyes. *Female:* Pale eyes.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Conservation:** Wherever possible, widen creek-side (riparian) corridors by planting clumps of shrubs and trees. Maintain trees that stand above the other layers of vegetation.



Tom Grey

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## Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

(*Polioptila caerulea*)

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**Identification:** 5" – Small with long tail. Bluish-gray upperparts. White eye ring and white outer tail feathers.

**Timing:** Summer.

**Diet:** Insects, spiders.

**Conservation:** Manage for a mix of dense shrubs interspersed with open areas.



Stuart MacKay

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## American Robin

(*Turdus migratorius*)

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**Identification:** 10" – Head and upperparts dark gray, head often blacker. Underparts rusty. Yellow bill.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, berries, earthworms.

**Conservation:** Create feeding habitat by planting fruit-bearing plants such as *Rubus ursinus* (California blackberry) and *Rhamus californica* (coffeeberry).

Steve Smith



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## Cedar Waxwing

(*Bombycilla cedrorum*)

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**Identification:** 7" – Sleek. Brown head with crest. Black mask. Pale yellow belly. Gray tail with yellow band at tips. Inner wing feathers may have “waxy” red tips.

**Timing:** Winter.

**Diet:** Fruit, insects.

**Conservation:** Avoid using pesticides on your land. Fruit sprayed with pesticides can poison birds that consume the berries.



Martin Meyers



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## Phainopepla

(*Phainopepla nitens*)

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**Identification:** 8" – Red eyes, spiky crest, white wing patches in flight. *Male* (shown): Glossy black. *Female*: Gray overall.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Berries, insects.

**Conservation:** Maintain shrubs and trees that produce small berries, including *Phoradendron* and *Arceuthobium* spp. (mistletoe) in oaks.



Tom Grey

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## Yellow-rumped Warbler

(*Dendroica coronata*)

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**Identification:** 5.5" – Yellow rump and side patches. White outer tail feathers. Overall plumage ranges from brown to blue-gray. Throat yellow or white.

**Timing:** Winter.

**Diet:** Insects, fruit.

**Conservation:** Promote vegetation structure by planting a diversity of native plants in your yard.



Steve Smith

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## Black-throated Gray Warbler

(*Dendroica nigrescens*)

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**Identification:** 5" – Gray upperparts, bold face pattern. Vertical black streaks on sides. Yellow above eye inconspicuous. White on outer tail feathers. Throat black or white – varies by age and sex.

**Timing:** Summer.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Conservation:** Preserve oak trees. *Quercus chrysolepis* (canyon oak) and *Q. wislizeni* (interior live oak) are commonly used for nest sites.



James R. Gallagher, Sea and Sage Audubon

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## Black-headed Grosbeak

(*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)

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**Identification:** 8" – *Male* (shown): Orange-brown with black head. Wings black and white. *Female*: Upperparts brown, underparts streaked. Tan eyebrow.

**Timing:** Summer.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds, berries.

**Conservation:** Plant dense clumps of shrubs and trees. Use native vegetation such as willows and oaks.



Stuart MacKay

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## House Finch

(*Carpodacus mexicanus*)

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**Identification:** 6" – Upperparts gray-brown with faint streaks. Underparts whitish with brown streaks. *Male* (shown): Head, chest, and rump red. Brown cheek patch. *Female*: Plain brown face.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Seeds, berries.

**Conservation:** Maintain native oak and streamside (riparian) habitats.



Wendy Willis

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## Lesser Goldfinch

(*Carduelis psaltria*)

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**Identification:** 5" – Upperparts greenish, underparts yellowish. Wings black with white patches. *Male* (shown): Crown black.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Seeds, insects.

**Conservation:** Plant native seed-producing grasses and wildflowers and dense clumps of shrubs and trees, such as willows and oaks.



Martin Meyers

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## Lawrence's Goldfinch

(*Carduelis lawrencei*)

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**Identification:** 5" – *Male* (shown): Black face. Upperparts gray. Yellow belly and wing bars. *Female*: Brownish gray upperparts and head. Yellow areas not as bright as male.

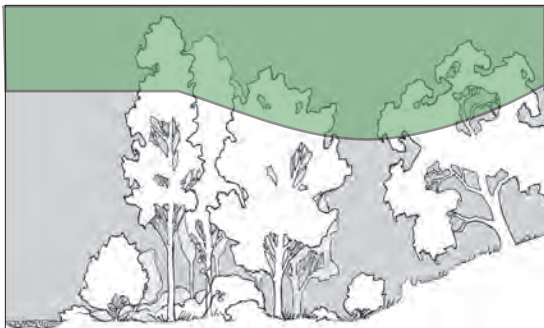
**Timing:** Summer.

**Diet:** Seeds, fruit.

**Conservation:** Promote native grasses and wildflowers, especially fiddleneck (*Amsinckia* spp.).

## Canopy Nesters and Dwellers

Canopy nesters build their nests near or at the tops of trees. The canopy layer is comprised of tall trees, such as blue oak (*Quercus kelloggii* and *Q. douglasii*) and gray pine (*Pinus sabineana*), that provide shade to the plants below. In the Foothills, many raptors nest in the canopy layer, but smaller birds such as the Hutton's Vireo can also be found nesting high in the treetops.



Canopy = the uppermost layer in a forest, formed by the crowns of trees.



## Canopy Habitat Improvement Tips

- Plant trees that are native to your region. Local oaks (*Quercus* spp.) and pines (*Pinus* spp.) can help contribute to a healthy canopy layer.
- Conduct necessary tree work (e.g., felling or pruning) during the non-nesting season (Sept.–Feb.), to avoid negative impacts to nesting birds.
- Retain trees that stand above the other layers of vegetation to promote structure.
- Plant a diversity of tree species. Planting a variety of oaks that have acorns at different times of the year can help support species that rely on acorns as food throughout the year.
- Allow the canopy to connect with other habitat layers.
- Promote oak regeneration and health.
- Minimize pesticide and rodenticide use. Allow insect- and rodent-eating birds to consume pests on your land. Prey that are free of poisons will keep the birds healthy, too!



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## Cooper's Hawk

(*Accipiter cooperii*)

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**Identification:** 17" – Tail long, rounded, and barred. Short, round wings. *Adult* (shown): Bluish-gray upperparts, reddish bars on underparts. *Young*: Brown upperparts, brown streaked underparts.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Birds and mammals.

**Conservation:** Maintain wide patches of riparian habitat where songbird-prey species are relatively abundant.

Martin Meyers



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## Red-shouldered Hawk

(*Buteo lineatus*)

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**Identification:** 19" – Upperwings checkered black and white. Head and upperparts gray, underparts rusty. *In flight:* Pale crescent near wingtip. Black and white bands on tail.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Small mammals, amphibians, reptiles.

**Conservation:** Connect patches of creekside vegetation by planting native trees.



Tom Grey

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## Red-tailed Hawk

(*Buteo jamaicensis*)

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**Identification:** 19" – Highly variable in appearance. *Adult* (shown): Tail broad and rufous. Commonly has pale chest and dark band across belly. *Young*: Brown tail finely barred black.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Mammals, birds, reptiles.

**Conservation:** Avoid disturbance near nest sites.

Martin Meyers



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## Golden Eagle

(*Aquila chrysaetos*)

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**Identification:** 30" – Large and dark. Outer wings often with white patches. *Adult* (shown): Base of tail gray. *Young*: Base of tail white.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Mammals, birds.

**Conservation:** Support programs that help increase awareness of human impacts on raptors.



Peter LaTourrette

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## Band-tailed Pigeon

(*Patagioenas fasciata*)

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**Identification:** 15" – Gray overall. Tail gray at base, with light gray stripe at end. Yellow legs and bill.

*Adult* (shown): White collar.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Seeds, fruit, pine nuts, acorns.

**Conservation:** Retain or plant oaks and berry-producing plants, which are important food sources.



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## Great Horned Owl

*(Bubo virginianus)*

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**Identification:** 22" – Large, gray-brown owl with thick ear tufts ("horns"). Yellow eyes. Series of low hoots heard at night.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians.

**Conservation:** Avoid using rodenticides at your home or property. Owls can be poisoned by feeding on rodents that have consumed poisons.



California Waterfowl Association

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## Western Kingbird

(*Tyrannus verticalis*)

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**Identification:** 9" – Belly yellow, chest pale gray, tail black with white outer edges. Head gray with darker mask, upperparts gray.

**Timing:** Summer.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Conservation:** Preserve snags for perching.





Martin Meyers

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## Hutton's Vireo

(*Vireo huttoni*)

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**Identification:** 5" – Stocky with drab olive upper-parts, white wing bars, eye ring, thick blue-gray legs, thick bill. Compare Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, spiders.

**Conservation:** Preserve oak and pine-oak forest habitat.



Boris Tonic

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## Common Raven

(*Corvus corax*)

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**Identification:** 24" – All black with wedge-shaped tail. Thick bill. Deep croaking calls.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Arthropods, amphibians, reptiles, birds (adults, chicks, eggs), small mammals, carrion, grains, buds, berries.

**Conservation:** Raven populations can have negative effects on other nesting birds. Do not supplement their diet, and keep food sources (e.g., compost piles) covered to prevent a feeding station.



Tom Grey

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## Ruby-crowned Kinglet

(*Regulus calendula*)

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**Identification:** 4" – Drab olive upperparts, white wing bars, eye ring, thin blackish legs, thin bill.

**Male:** Concealed red patch on head. Compare Hutton's Vireo.

**Timing:** Winter.

**Diet:** Spiders, insects, fruit, seeds.

**Conservation:** Preserve streamside (riparian) and oak woodland habitat.



Tom Grey

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## Bullock's Oriole

(*Icterus bullockii*)

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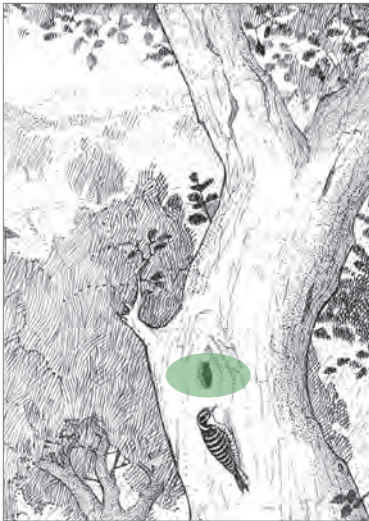
**Identification:** 9" – *Male* (shown): Face and underparts orange with black eyeline and throat. Crown and back black, wings black and white. *Female*: Upperparts olive-gray, underparts yellow and gray. Two white wing bars.

**Timing:** Summer.

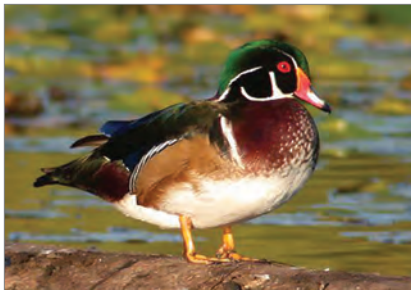
**Diet:** Insects, berries, nectar.

**Conservation:** Maintain large native trees along river corridors, especially oaks and *Populus* spp. (cottonwoods).

# Cavity and Non-traditional Nesters



Cavity = a hollow or hole in a tree.



Stuart MacKay

---

## Wood Duck

(*Aix sponsa*)

---

**Identification:** 19" *Male* (shown): Head and crest dark green with white stripes. Red eyes and bill, white throat extending to cheek. Upperparts blackish, maroon chest. *Female*: Brown overall with thick white, teardrop-shaped eyering.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Acorns, other seeds, invertebrates.

**Conservation:** Retain large native trees and snags with cavities near creeks and ponds.



Lyann Comrack

---

## American Kestrel

(*Falco sparverius*)

---

**Identification:** 9" – Small falcon with long pointed wings, long tail. Often seen perched on wires in open habitat. Boldly patterned face. Rufous upperparts with black bars. *Male* (shown): Blue-gray wings.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Mammals.

**Conservation:** Retain dead standing trees (snags) as potential nest sites.

Steve Smith



---

**Western  
Screech Owl**  
(*Megascops kennicottii*)

---

**Identification:** 8.5" – Small owl with “ear tufts.” Yellow eyes. Call an accelerating series of short hoots.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Small animals, especially mammals.

**Conservation:** Conserve streamside (riparian) habitat and retain snags and other native trees with old woodpecker cavities for nest sites.



Peter LaTourrette



---

## Northern Pygmy Owl

(*Glaucidium gnoma*)

---

**Identification:** 7" – Small owl, no ear tufts, long tail. Call repeated single or double hoots.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Small birds, mammals, insects.

**Conservation:** See conservation of woodpecker species, as Northern Pygmy Owls depend on old woodpecker nests for their own nest sites.



Martin Meyers

---

## White-throated Swift

(*Aeronautes saxatalis*)

---

**Identification:** 7" – Sleek with long, straight wings. Black overall with white throat, belly and rump patches. Fast, agile flight.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Conservation:** Postpone activities that would disturb nesting birds (Mar.–Aug.) and avoid widespread use of pesticides, especially aerial spraying.



Rick Lewis

---

## Belted Kingfisher

(*Megaceryle alcyon*)

---

**Identification:** 13" – Long, pointed bill; bushy head. Upperparts blue-gray with white collar. Blue-gray band across chest. *Female* (shown): Also has rusty band across chest.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Small fish.

**Conservation:** Protect areas with stream-burrows. Kingfishers dig burrows into the soft banks of streams and rivers for nesting. Remove concrete, rock and other barriers to bank burrows.



Eric Preston

---

## Lewis's Woodpecker

(*Melanerpes lewis*)

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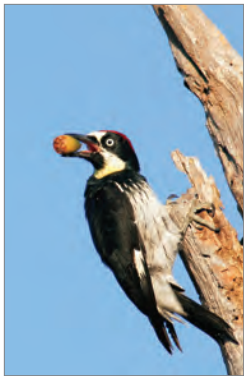
**Identification:** 11" – Green back, red belly and face. Appears black in flight.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, acorns, other nuts, fruit.

**Conservation:** Retain dead trees (snags) and partially dead trees to increase potential nest sites.

Tom Grey



---

## Acorn Woodpecker

(*Melanerpes formicivorus*)

---

**Identification:** 9" – Black with white wing patches and rump. Red head, whitish face. Often in groups.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, acorns, fruit, other plant material.

**Conservation:** Protect all species of oaks on your land. A mix of oaks that vary in timing of seed production will help maintain bird populations that require acorns in their diets.



Martin Meyers

---

## Nuttall's Woodpecker

(*Picoides nuttallii*)

---

**Identification:** 8" – Black and white with barred upperparts. Spotted belly. *Male* (shown): Red on back of head.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Conservation:** Retain dead trees (snags) and partially dead trees to increase potential nest sites.



Martin Meyers

---

## Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker

(*Colaptes auratus*)

---

**Identification:** 13" – Orange-red under-wings and tail. White rump. Black necklace. *Male* (shown): reddish mustache.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects (especially ants), fruits, seeds.

**Conservation:** Retain dead trees (snags) and partially dead trees to increase potential nest sites.

Lyann Conrack



---

**Black Phoebe**  
(*Sayornis nigricans*)

---

**Identification:** 7" – Black overall with white belly. Often dips tail while perched.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Conservation:** Black Phoebes are usually found near water. Protect streamside (riparian) habitat.



Martin Meyers



---

## Ash-throated Flycatcher

(*Myiarchus cinerascens*)

---

**Identification:** 9" – Bushy head. Belly pale yellow. Rusty wings and tail. Head and upperparts gray-brown. Face gray. Throat and chest pale gray.

**Timing:** Summer.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Conservation:** Retain large native trees and snags with cavities in streamside (riparian) and oak habitats.



Wendy Willis

---

## Violet-green Swallow

(*Tachycineta thalassina*)

---

**Identification:** 5" – Crown and upperparts dark green, sometimes with purple gloss. *Male* (shown): Face, throat, and upperparts white. *Female*: Face pattern duller.

**Timing:** Summer.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Conservation:** Retain dead trees (snags) and large native trees with cavities near creeks and ponds.



Tom Grey

---

## Oak Titmouse

(*Baeolophus inornatus*)

---

**Identification:** 6" – Gray overall with brown tinge. Crest on head often visible.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Seeds, invertebrates.

**Conservation:** Help protect oak woodland habitat and maintain a high canopy cover (40–70% cover).



Chris Rintoul

---

## White-breasted Nuthatch

(*Sitta carolinensis*)

---

**Identification:** 6" – Upperparts gray with blackish cap. Face and underparts white, sides rusty. Descends tree trunks facing down.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds.

**Conservation:** Retain dead trees (snags) and large native trees with cavities.



Steve Smith

---

## Rock Wren

(*Salpinctes obsoletus*)

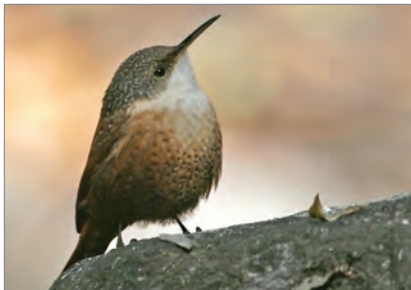
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**Identification:** 6" – Pale gray. Buff tips on tail feathers. Down-curved bill.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, other arthropods.

**Conservation:** Maintain areas with rocky outcroppings, such as among shrub and streamside (riparian) habitats.



Martin Meyers

---

## Canyon Wren

(*Catherpes mexicanus*)

---

**Identification:** 6" – White throat and breast contrasts with reddish belly. Reddish upperparts. Long, down-curved bill.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Spiders, insects.

**Conservation:** This species is often found in steep canyons and on cliffs. Shaded canyons along streams maintain cool temperatures during times of intense heat.



Tom Grey

---

## Bewick's Wren

(*Thryomanes bewickii*)

---

**Identification:** 5" – White eyebrow. Head and upperparts brown with black barring on wings and tail. Underparts whitish. Often flips tail from side to side.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Conservation:** Plant clumps of native shrubs and trees. Create potential nest sites by retaining fallen logs, snags, and exposed roots.



Martin Meyers

---

## House Wren

(*Troglodytes aedon*)

---

**Identification:** 5" – Brownish overall, paler below. Pale eyering, barred wings and tail.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Conservation:** Retain dead trees (snags) and large native trees with cavities near creeks and ponds.



Martin Meyers



---

## Western Bluebird

(*Sialia mexicana*)

---

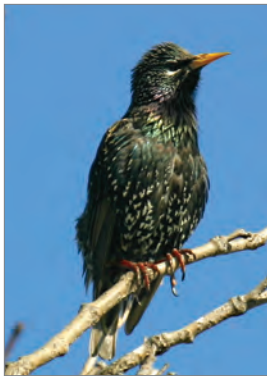
**Identification:** 7" – *Male* (shown): Head, throat and upperparts deep blue. Chest rusty, belly blue-gray. *Female*: Grayish overall with blue in wings and tail. Rusty chest paler than male.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Insects, berries.

**Conservation:** Retain dead trees (snags) and large native trees with cavities in oak woodland and streamside (riparian) habitats.

Rick Lewis



---

## European Starling

(*Sturnus vulgaris*)

---

**Identification:** 9" – Glossy black with green and purple iridescence. Short tail, triangular wings. Most whitish spots on tips of fresh fall feathers wear off by spring. *Breeding:* Yellow bill.

**Timing:** Year-round.

**Diet:** Invertebrates, fruit, grains, seeds.

**Conservation:** Introduced to New York City in 1890 and now widespread throughout North America. Avoid feeding starlings at bird feeders, and keep composts covered. Do not allow them to nest in nest boxes.

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## **Websites**

PRBO Conservation Science:

[www.prbo.org](http://www.prbo.org)

California Partners in Flight:

[www.prbo.org/calpif](http://www.prbo.org/calpif)

Cornell Lab of Ornithology – All About Birds:

[www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/)



## Notes from the Field

## Notes from the Field



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