

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Cabrillo National Monument



Shorebirds of Cabrillo National Monument



NPS Photograph by Harry Engels

Cabrillo's Shorebirds

As you explore the rocky intertidal zone, this brochure can serve as a helpful guide to identifying the many species of shorebirds that reside in and around the tide pools.

PELICANS (FAMILY: PELICANIDAE)

The most commonly seen pelican at Cabrillo's tidepools is the California Brown Pelican. The pelicans nest on the Los Coronados Islands in Baja California, Mexico. These islands can be seen in the distance as you gaze out into the ocean at the tidepools. California Brown Pelicans have just recently been removed from the list of threatened and endangered species. Groups of this remarkable bird most notably can be seen flying low over the water's surface in V-formations. (Below, Photograph by Will Elder, NPS)



HERONS & EGRETS (FAMILY: ARDEIDAE)

Different types of Herons and Egrets also can be observed hunting in the shallow waters of the tidepools. They can be identified by their long beaks, necks and legs. Cabrillo National Monument plays host to the Snowy Egret, Great Egret, and Great Blue Heron. The Snowy Egret's black legs and yellow feet make it easy to identify (pictured below, left). The Great Egret is a large all white bird, and it's stature is usually a bit larger than that of the Great Blue Heron. The Great Blue Heron (below, right) has blue-grey plumage with an orange toned beak and legs. (Photographs by Bill Ratcliff and Harry Engels, respectively, NPS)



GULLS (FAMILY: LARIDAE)

Gulls are a familiar bird species in San Diego, California and many of them are year-round residents to the tidepools at Cabrillo. The most commonly sighted gull is the Western Gull, which nests in the Point Loma area. Immature Western Gulls have brown toned plumage. Mature adults have white heads and bodies with gray wings. Other gulls that frequent the tidepools are Heermann's Gull and the California Gull. Pictured below is a mature Western Gull. (Photograph by Bryan Harry, NPS)



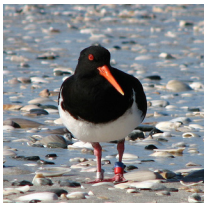
TERNs (FAMILY: STERNIDAE)

Terns were once considered a sub-family of the gull family, Laridae. While they do bear a resemblance to gulls, they are considerably smaller. Often times, Terns can be seen flying slowly over the water and dipping down quickly to capture their prey—primarily fish. However, they also feed on small crustaceans and insects. While enjoying your visit to the tidepools, you are most likely to see a Royal Tern or a Forster's Tern. Both are year-round residents of the park. Photographed below are three Forster's Terns. (Photograph by Will Elder, NPS)



OYSTERCATCHERS (FAMILY: HAEMATOPODIAE)

Cabrillo National Monument hosts a year-round stock of Black Oystercatchers and a seasonal stock of American Oystercatchers. Black Oystercatchers have entirely black bodies with long and vibrantly colored bill and legs, while American Oystercatchers have black and brown bodies with white on their wings and underbellies. This species never strays far from the shore and can occasionally be spotted feeding on invertebrates at Cabrillo National Monument. These birds are very skiddish, so consider yourself very lucky if you do indeed see one!



SANDPIPERS (FAMILY: SCOLOPACIDAE)

The Wandering Tattler, Spotted Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Black Turnstone, Sanderling, Western Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, Surfbird, and Whimbrel are a few of the migratory Sandpipers that occasionally reside at Cabrillo National Monument during the winter months. These birds can be seen frequenting the rocky shores and cliffs at the tidepools. Their sizes vary from small to large. Basic plumage includes shades of brown and gray with white speckled patterns on the body and wings, and white underbellies. There are many types of birds within this family, but what distinguishes them from one another are their habits and behavioral patterns.

SPOTTED SANDPIPERS and WANDERING TATTLERS (both medium-sized shorebirds) can be identified by the constant up and down bobbing of their tails (or “teetering”) as they walk.

WESTERN SANDPIPERS are small birds with short necks and moderately large beaks. They have black legs, and their backs are normally grayish brown with hints of a reddish hue.

RUDDY TURNSTONES and BLACK TURNSTONES are stocky and somewhat small shorebirds with short and slightly upturned beaks. Ruddy Turnstones have bright orange legs, brown backs and black-and-white facial markings. Black Turnstones have nearly all black bodies with white underbellies and black legs and feet.

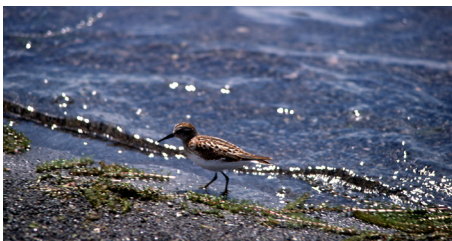
WHIMBRELS are medium-sized shorebirds that have noticeably thin downturned beaks with striped heads and grayish-brown speckled bodies.

MARbled GODWITS are somewhat large shorebirds with long bills. Their slightly upturned bills are pinkish at the base but otherwise black. Their bodies are mostly brown with dark speckles on their backs and wings.

SURFBIRDS are medium-sized shorebirds with short bills and bright yellow legs. Their plumage is a brownish-gray with white speckles.

SANDERLINGS are small sandpipers with varying shades of brown, with spotty white and black plumage on their backs. Their underbellies are white.

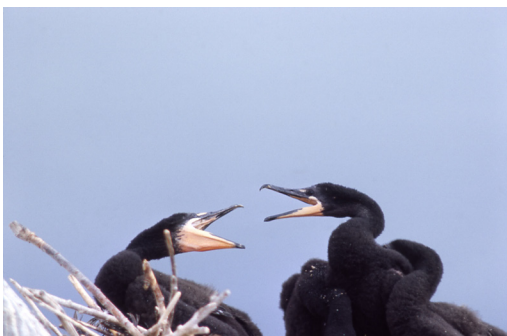
Shown below is a Spotted Sandpiper (top) and a Sanderling (bottom). (Photographs by Momich and J. Schmidt, respectively)



CORMORANTS (FAMILY: PHALACROCORACIDAE)

At Cabrillo National Monument, you may see large, dark colored birds with long tails and necks diving into the water to fish for their prey. These birds are most likely Cormorants. The two most commonly seen Cormorants at Cabrillo are Double-Crested Cormorants and Brandt's Cormorants.

These large birds nest on the rocks, often with or near herons. In order to fish for food, Cormorants dive into the water and, with the help of their wings and feet, can swim up to 25 feet underwater in order to catch their prey. Double-Crested Cormorants and Brandt's Cormorants have large, dark bodies. Immature Cormorants (shown below) have large reddish spots on their necks. (Photographs of two Double-Crested Cormorant nestlings by Bryan Harry, NPS)



TYRANT FLYCATCHERS (FAMILY: TYRANNIDAE)

This family includes species that frequent Cabrillo's shores, such as the Black Phoebe and Say's Phoebe. The Black Phoebe is a year-round resident and the Say's Phoebe is a bird that can be commonly seen during the winter months, as it is a seasonal migrant. They are small birds. Phoebe's have noticeably contrasting plumage: the Say's Phoebe has dark brown or grayish upperparts and a tawny belly, and the Black Phoebe (shown in the photo below) has black coloring on the head, breast, back, wings and tail, and white underneath on its belly and wings. (Photograph by Will Elder, NPS)



As you explore, keep in mind that these aren't the only birds that are out there!

This exists to serve merely as a guide so that you may become better acquainted with San Diego and Cabrillo National Monument's most abundant bird species.

ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RANGERS
AND VOLUNTEERS AT CABRILLO NATIONAL MONUMENT—
HAPPY BIRDING!

