
A CHECKLIST OF BIRDS
OF
PINNACLES NATIONAL MONUMENT

COMPILED BY GAVIN EMMONS



C A L I F O R N I A

PUBLISHED BY WESTERN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION

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This checklist presents 181 species of birds known to have occurred within the boundaries of Pinnacles National Monument since its establishment in 1908. Much of the information contained in the checklist is based on the field work conducted in the monument by Michael L. Avery and Charles van Riper III from November 1983 through May 1986. Checklist data was updated by Shelley Buranek from 1997 to 1999, when she resurveyed observation points and plots used originally by Avery and van Riper, and compared their abundance, breeding, and habitat data with her own. Additional data were obtained from a landbird inventory conducted by Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) staff in 2001-02, Kent Van Vuren's annotated checklist for San Benito County (2005), several published accounts of birding trips to the monument (including Roland Wauer, 1968), and from unpublished records kept by former monument personnel, particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Finally, presence of bird species within the monument was updated in 2002-2011 by park staff including Gavin Emmons, Amy Fesnock, Daniel George, Jim Petterson, and Paul Johnson, based on analysis of historic and current observations and breeding records for avian species. Gavin Emmons also verified rare bird records in personal communications with R.J. Adams, Kent Van Vuren, and PRBO staff including Diana Humple.

The relatively small area (about 27,000 acres) encompassed by the monument contains a variety of habitat types which support a diverse assemblage of birds. 54 species are considered year-round residents in the monument, and there are breeding records for 82 species. An additional 13 species may nest here, but documentation is lacking.

Included in the list are the California Condor (federally listed "Endangered") and the Peregrine Falcon (federally de-listed from "Endangered" in 1999), both of which were regularly seen in the past, but which are now seldom seen. These are included in the 14 species of concern that occur in the monument, signified by a "^" next to the common names. There are 7 exotic species on the list: Ring-Necked Pheasant, Chukar, Wild Turkey, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, European Starling, and House Sparrow. These are indicated by a "~" next to the common names.

Common names of species follow the 1998 American Ornithologists' Union Checklist of North American Birds, 7th edition, and the 52nd supplement (2011) to the Checklist. Following common names for each species on the checklist are columns which give the following information: 1.) abundance by month, habitat, and in general; and 2.) the breeding status of the species.

H A B I T A T T Y P E S

The following habitat descriptions are intended as a general guide to the distribution of bird species in the monument. For each habitat type indicated for a species, abundance is documented. For accidental and occasional species observed as flyovers, habitat type is listed respective of the flyover locations.

Ch - CHAPARRAL: shrub-dominated habitat that covers over 80% of the monument. The predominant shrub species vary with site characteristics. Chamise chaparral occurs on the dry south- and west-facing slopes; holly-leaf cherry chaparral is found in moister ravines and on north-facing slopes; and mixed chaparral, with components of buckbrush and manzanita, occurs on north-facing slopes not suitable for holly-leaf cherry.

CI - CLIFFS, ROCKS, AND RIDGES: sheer rocky outcroppings, for which the monument was named, provide ideal habitat for several bird species.

G - GRASSLAND: dominated by exotic annual grass species, these areas were formally pastures and were probably created by burning and clearing of native woody vegetation.

O - OAK / PINE WOODLANDS: on hillsides, the dominant tree species is blue oak; in flat areas, such as near the east entrance to the monument, the valley and live oaks are the main species. Gray pine and California juniper are frequent associates of the oaks. Most blue oak stands in the monument have a shrub understory of species such as buckbrush, mountain mahogany, and redberry.

R - RIPARIAN: restricted to a narrow belt along major creeks and streams in the monument. The vegetation is variable, with sycamore, cottonwood, willow, gray pine, and coast live oak each dominating at certain sites. In contrast, some open, sandy stretches of Chalone Creek are virtually devoid of woody vegetation. Included in the habitat type is Bear Gulch Reservoir, the only permanent standing water in the monument.

D A T A F O R A C C I D E N T A L R E C O R D S

Common Loon - 1 record, 12/15/2006 (J. Petterson). Juvenile or 1st summer bird, sitting in Maintenance Yard parking lot unable to take off. Captured and transported to Paicines Reservoir, where it swam away, dove, and resurfaced.

Western Grebe - 1 record, 12/5/1961 (Warren). On roadway near Chalone Campground, transported to and released at Bear Gulch Reservoir.

Double-crested Cormorant - 1 record, 9/13/2006 (A. Welch). 2 cormorants observed flying over upper Grassy Canyon from north to south.

Great Egret - 2 records, 3/2/2007 (G. Emmons), 1/7/2010 (G. Emmons). First record documented adult in flight over Chalone Creek from near junction of Bench

Trail and South Wilderness Road junction. Second record documented adult in flight northwest to southeast over Drywall Slide area.

Canada Goose - 1 record, 12/19/2010 (A. Welch). Approximately 50 geese observed flying south to north over Grassy Canyon, then Horse Valley.

Cinnamon Teal - 1 record, 2/26/2010 (L. Regan). 6 males, 4 females, and 10 young observed swimming in pond formed by dam on Regan Ranch property (within congressional boundary of Pinnacles National Monument).

Hooded Merganser - 1 record, 2/9/2008 (G. Emmons). Immature bird observed swimming on Bear Gulch Reservoir.

Common Merganser - 1 record, 5/16/2003 (G. Emmons). Observed on west end of Reservoir.

Swainson's Hawk - 4 records, February 1984 (M. Avery & C. Van Riper), 4/28/1990 (J. & N. Aguilloon), 2/21/2002 (B. Kinkade), 3/28/2002 (A. Grant). Observed respectively over Chalone Creek, over Hawkins Peak, and North Chalone Peak for the last two records.

Ring-necked Pheasant - 1 record, 5/17/2006 (S. Franklet). Adult observed near East Side Park Entrance gate.

Mountain Quail - 2 records, 5/1/1983 (K. & K. Van Vuren), 4/26/2010 (M. Holyoak). For second record, adult male observed calling and perched on low gray pine on zigzag bends up High Peaks Trail from Chalone housing area.

Virginia Rail - 1 record, 8/27/1958 (R. Wauer). Observed near the Chalone Creek bridge.

Lesser Yellowlegs - 2 records, April 1982 (M. Avery & C. Van Riper), 4/15/1982 (G. McMichael and M.C. Wilson). For second record, observed at Chalone Creek near Peak's View.

Baird's Sandpiper - 1 record, 4/18/1982 (G. McMichael and M.C. Wilson). Chalone Creek near Peak's View.

Western Sandpiper - 2 records, 12/26/1998 (Christmas count), 12/27/2000 (Christmas count).

Black-legged Kittiwake - 1 record, 3/3/1976 (P.R. Tader). Found dead at west entrance.

White-winged Dove - 1 record, October 1953 (M. Avery & C. Van Riper).

Burrowing Owl - 1 record, 10/20/2006 (R. Saulino). Adult observed inside boundary fence near Bear Creek Headwaters, then flushed S onto private land.

Black Swift - 1 record, 5/19/1994 (G. Volkman). Observed at Chalone Creek just downstream of maintenance complex.

Vaux's Swift - 1 record, 10/31/08 (D. George). 5-8 individuals observed circling with group of ~25 White-throated Swifts over RM office at Bear Gulch Headquarters. NOTE: species likely a regular migrant, but poorly documented in region in past years.

Calliope Hummingbird - 2 records, 3/14/1993 (N. Lethaby), 4/24/1993 (N. Lethaby).

Pileated Woodpecker - 1 record, 3/26/2006 (J. Turner). Adult male observed in Pinnacles Campground, on gray pine snag just east upslope camping areas.

Hammond's Flycatcher - 1 record, 4/18/1997 (N. Lethaby).

Purple Martin - 1 record, 4/26/2010 (M. Holyoak). Adult male observed circling in flight with several White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows over ridge south of High Peaks Trail up from Chalone housing area.

Bell's Vireo - 2 records, May 6-7, 1972 (B. & S. Gerow), May 21-23 (D.S. Sparks).

Clark's Nutcracker - 2 records, 9/10/1935 (Grinnell & Miller), 1/3/1998 (D. Ekdahl). Second record documented at Bear Gulch Visitor Center.

Northern Mockingbird - 4 records, May 1955 (M. Avery & C. Van Riper), April 1973 (M. Avery & C. Van Riper), 12/8/2002 (W. Artz), 6/1/2002 (T. Haff). Last 2 records observed respectively on pine tree near Bear Gulch Nature Center, and near west entrance to the park during a Point Reyes Bird Observatory landbird inventory.

Golden-winged Warbler - 1 record, 5/30/2005 (N. Weber). Record of adult male confirmed visually in riparian area across from East Side entrance meadow.

American Redstart - 1 record, 6/19/2008 (G. Emmons). Adult male observed at south end of Bear Gulch Reservoir, feeding on insects and singing on red willow.

Northern Waterthrush - 1 record, 9/1/1954 (B. & B. Jackson).

Hooded Warbler - 1 record, 5/8/2001 (S. Scoggin). Record confirmed visually at South Chalone Peak during a Point Reyes Bird Observatory landbird inventory.

Green-tailed Towhee - 2 records, 4/24/1954 (W. Livingstone), 9/22/1954 (B. Jackson).

Cassin's Finch - 1 record, 3/16/1997 (N. Lethaby).

Evening Grosbeak - 2 records, February 1901 (Grinnell & Miller), March 1901 (Grinnell & Miller).

BREEDING STATUS

■Breeding confirmed through the presence of an active nest or very recent fledglings.

ABUNDANCE

The likelihood of encountering a given species depends on several factors including habitat type, season, time of day, and weather conditions. The following categories indicate the relative probability of recording a species in the proper habitat at the appropriate time of year.

-**Abundant**: always encountered, sometimes in large numbers.
- ▒**Common**: usually encountered.
- ░**Uncommon**: not encountered most of the time, but observed every year.
-**Rare**: low probability of encountering the species, but observed in most years.
- ◻**Occasional and Accidental**: very low probability to extremely low probability of encountering the species; not observed most years or 5 or fewer confirmed records of the species in the park.

OTHER SPECIES CODES

- ^ - species of concern, including federally endangered and threatened species.
- ~ - introduced / exotic species not native to the monument.



Habitat

J F M A M J J A S O N D

Rufous-crowned Sparrow	Ch, O	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Sage Sparrow	Ch, G, O	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Black-chinned Sparrow	Ch, G	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Chipping Sparrow	Ch, G, O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Lark Sparrow	G	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Grasshopper Sparrow	G	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Golden-crowned Sparrow	Ch, O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
White-throated Sparrow	Ch, O, R	·	·	·							·
White-crowned Sparrow	Ch, O	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Fox Sparrow	R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Song Sparrow	R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Lincoln's Sparrow	Ch, G, O	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Dark-eyed Junco	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

BLACKBIRDS, ORIOLES

Western Meadowlark	Ch, G	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Brown-headed Cowbird	G	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Red-winged Blackbird	R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Brewer's Blackbird	G, O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Bullock's Oriole	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Hooded Oriole	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

FINCHES

Evening Grosbeak	O, R	·	·								
Purple Finch	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Cassin's Finch	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
House Finch	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Pine Siskin	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Lesser Goldfinch	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Lawrence's Goldfinch	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
American Goldfinch	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

House Sparrow ~	O, R	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
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BIRD CHECKLIST UPDATES

(updated October 2024)

DATA FOR ACCIDENTAL RECORDS: ADDITIONS

- Greater White-fronted Goose** – 1 record, 10/9/2018 (R. Hope). 48 geese seen flying in large V pattern, vocalizing and flying southwest above Bench Trail near Peaks View Area parking.
- Common Goldeneye** – 2 records, 1/27/2015 (G. Emmons, A. Schmidt, J. Belli), 1/31/2015. 2 adults observed swimming at Bear Gulch Reservoir for a week leading up to 1-31-15. Adult female of pair photographed to confirm identification.
- Bufflehead** – 2 records, 1/1/2013 (G. Emmons, A. Welch, D. George, D. Rao), 12/3/2022 (G. Emmons). Adult female observed swimming, diving, feeding at Bear Gulch Reservoir on 1/1/2013. Adult female observed swimming with 12 Mallards at Bear Gulch Reservoir on 12/3/2022.
- Wood Duck** – 1 record, 9/3/2016 (G. Emmons, D. George, P. Johnson, D. Rao). 2 individuals observed paddling on Bear Gulch Reservoir, flying and circling in area, then returning to paddle on reservoir.
- Solitary Sandpiper** – 2 records, likely of one individual, 8/16/2016 (P. Johnson), 8/19/2016 (D. George). One individual foraging along edge of seasonal pond in upper Rose Canyon.
- California Gull** – 1 record, 1/11/2015 (G. Emmons). 60-70 gulls flying in V-formation, south to north over Balconies. Possibly herring and ring-billed gulls among flock as well.
- Mountain Chickadee** – 1 record, 1/8/2011 (R. ???). Singing adult heard, then observed, in oaks / pines near Pinnacles Campground near Visitor Center.
- Sage Thrasher** – 1 record, 10/1/2024 (D. George). 1 individual observed near east side entrance to park, perching on fence posts, then flying towards the park entrance sign just south of the Highway 25 turnoff.
- Black-and-white Warbler** – 1 record, 5/8/2018 (R. Hope). 1 individual observed along Bear Gulch Trail near Bear Gulch day-use area, foraging in a mixed species warbler flock.

DATA FOR ALL RECORDS: PREVIOUSLY UNDOCUMENTED MONTHS

- Double-crested Cormorant** – 1 record, 11/18/2021 (R. Banks). Flying over West Side Contact Station.
- Great Egret** – Multiple records from 4/5/2018 to 4/19/2018 (G. Emmons and D. Soto) of one individual flying and roosting at Pinnacles Campground and north to Bacon Barn area, feeding on lizards, snakes, and small mammals.
- American Coot** – 2 records, 12/31/2011 (G. Emmons), 12/30/2012 (D. George). First record of one adult swimming, foraging, perching at Bear Gulch Reservoir. Second record of one individual swimming at Bear Gulch Reservoir.
- Virginia Rail** – Multiple records, specifically from 4/7/13 (R. Scaff), 9/11/14 (photographed, sent to P. Johnson), 4/7/15 (G. Emmons and A. Welch, pair observed and photographed), during December and January CBC counts for 2011-2015 (R. Neidhardt, R. Scaff), and through all months of year (R. Neidhardt). Breeding not confirmed, but at least 1-2 resident breeding pairs likely at Pinnacles Campground.
- Lewis' Woodpecker** – 1 record, 12/16/2013 (J. Belli). Adult flying N to S over Grassy Canyon.
- Pileated Woodpecker** – Multiple records (likely of 1 adult male), from 10/3/2022 (K. Lopez) until at least 11/9/2022 (D. George). Observed in Grassy Canyon, along South Wilderness Trail, and at upper Bear Gulch near main parking lot.
- Belted Kingfisher** – 1 record, 8/25/2012 (A. Welch and G. Emmons). Adult perches, flies at Bear Gulch Reservoir.
- Osprey** – 3 records, 9/5/2012 (A. Welch and G. Emmons), 1/11/2016 (P.T. Lathrop, C. Rhinehardt, S. Tomkiewicz), 2/15/2016 (R. Holmes). For first record, adult calls, flies S past Monolith towards Bear Gulch Reservoir. For second record, one bird seen flying over Reservoir. For third record, individual bird soars over west side Visitor Contact Station, then NNE.
- Red-breasted Nuthatch** – 5 records, 9/22/2015 (A. Welch), 9/23/2015 (J. Negreann), 9/26/2015 (J. Negreann), 3/9/2024 (“wyatherp” on iNat), and 4/9/2024 (P. Barnes). First record of one adult on sycamore in lower Bear Gulch, second record of one bird near Bear Gulch HQ, third record of one bird near Pinnacles Visitor Center. Third record of one bird along Sycamore Trail just south of main Bear Gulch parking lot, fourth record of one bird along switchbacks of Blue Oak Trail.
- Hermit Thrush** – 2 records, 9/21/2015 (G. Emmons) and 9/29/2015 (J. Negreann and P. Johnson). First record of one individual along lower Condor Gulch road, second record of several birds near Bear Gulch Cave Trail and Moses Spring Trail junction.
- Northern Mockingbird** – 2 records, 8/20/2016 (D. George), 9/29/2024 (P. Johnson). First record of one individual observed at close range in bottomlands, near Butterfield Barn, perching and singing, and second record of one bird in the bottomlands.
- Hermit Warbler** – 1 record, 7/31/2013 (J. Belli). Adult perches, vocalizes on pine in Grassy Canyon.
- Golden-Crowned Kinglet** – 1 record, 5/4/2013 (G. Emmons). Adult calling, foraging in blue oak next to Bear Gulch housing quarters #19.
- Lincoln's Sparrow** – 1 record, 1/22/2015 (A. Welch). Adult foraging in shrub / grassland habitat in McCabe Canyon. Confirmed with diagnostic photos.
- Pine Siskin** – Multiple records for November to January from 2015 to present, from multiple sources. Migrating and wintering flocks seen occasionally in most years.
- Lawrence's Goldfinch** – Multiple records, December 2014 and January 2015 (G. Emmons, A. Welch, P. Johnson, D. George). Foraging flocks observed in chaparral habitat near Bear Gulch Reservoir, along Rim Trail, near Yaks Wall, and in Pinnacles Campground.

CONFIRMED BREEDING RECORDS: ADDITIONS

- Downy Woodpecker** – 1 record, 5/20/2013 (G. Emmons). Adult male observed repeatedly feeding begging fledgling on blue oaks next to Bear Gulch housing quarters #19.