

Wetlands Boardwalk

Redwood Information Center - Orick, CA



WETLANDS



A wetland can be a pond, marsh, lake or anyplace that holds water for a relatively long period of time. Influenced by the amount of rainfall and the ocean tides, these areas are essential to the survival of nearly three-quarters of North America's bird species. Used for drinking water, food, nesting, and resting places along their migrational route, it is important to preserve as much of this habitat as possible. Currently, wetlands are disappearing at a rate of nearly 1/2 million acres per year due primarily to poor farming practices, commercial development, and pollution from pesticide runoff. As they disappear, so do the species that depend on them.

Wetlands are used by a variety of wildlife in addition to waterfowl. Signs such as "left-overs" of bone and fur from a raccoon's last meal, tracks from a passing bobcat, or chewed sticks from the occasional beaver visit, all hint at the variety of wildlife found here.



BIRDS, BIRDS, & MORE BIRDS

Spend a day, a month, or a year here, and treat yourself to one of the best birding areas on the west coast.

A spring stroll on the boardwalk will reveal Red-winged blackbirds staking out territories among the cattails while Marsh wrens nest in the rushes. The once endangered Brown Pelican, now a common sight, flies over the ocean waves in summer. Any time of year, look skyward for Osprey searching for fish in the creek or the elegant Black-shouldered Kite hovering over the grasses, stalking an unsuspecting field mouse.

Caspian Terns scream raucously as they fly overhead with Western Gulls, while Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, and Black-crowned Night Herons ply the waters for fish. Sanderlings, Whimbrels, Sandpipers, and Killdeer scurry along the shore in search of food.

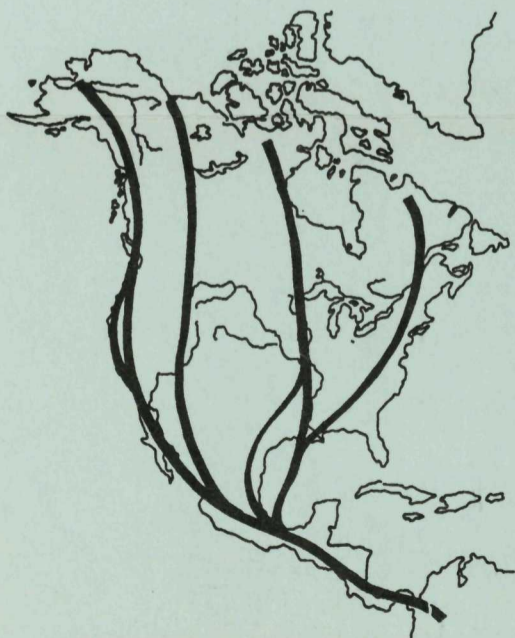
A total of nearly 300 bird species can be found in Redwood National Park. How many can you identify on this short walk?

SEASONAL MIGRATIONS

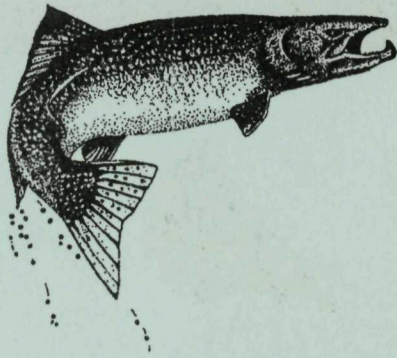
Soaring along the coastline, pelicans, terns, gulls and wading birds travel the Pacific Flyway, one of four crucial migratory routes for many bird species.

The arrival of birds in the spring and their departure at the end of the breeding season is one of the most familiar aspects of North American bird biology. It is this seasonal migration that allows birds to avoid the stresses of unfavorable climates and to take advantage of abundant food supplies that are available for only limited periods each year. While we may think of many species as "our birds" that go South for the winter, it may be more accurate to think of them as southern species that make a relatively brief foray north during the summer months.

Scientists aren't certain how migrating birds find their way over long distances, but they are discovering that birds have an astonishing variety of sensory cues that may be used for navigation. Observers have long theorized that migrants use mountain ranges, rivers, and coastlines for guidance. Some birds may also set their courses by the sun, the patterns of the stars, or even the lines of force in the earth's magnetic field. How the migrants process the cues is a mystery. The incredible fact remains that birds know where they are, and where they are going!



REDWOOD CREEK ESTUARY



The overlook at the end of this walk provides an opportunity to sit awhile and view the Redwood Creek estuary. An estuary is a place where fresh water from a river or stream meets the salt water of an ocean. It is this mix of fresh and salt water that makes an estuary one of the most productive ecosystems in the world. This estuary functions as a "holding area" or nursery for salmon and steelhead trout as they migrate through the 280 square mile watershed of Redwood Creek.

The condition of the forest and hillsides, within this watershed, is reflected in the overall health of the creek and its estuary. Historic uses of the area and changes along the creek's banks have negatively affected this ecosystem. Once known for its abundant salmon and steelhead runs, Redwood Creek

currently produces less than 10% of the fish population that it produced 30 years ago. Redwood National Park has undertaken a far-reaching rehabilitation program within this watershed to remove barriers to migration and to slow erosion caused by previous timber harvesting practices, thereby restoring the habitat for salmon and steelhead reproduction and rearing. Although some improvement has occurred, decades may be necessary for the populations of these magnificent fish to return to their historic levels.

BIODIVERSITY

National Parks have long been viewed as places where people can go to experience the natural environment and get away from it all. This role is important, of course, but so are other, less appreciated values. One such value is the role of the national parks in maintaining the biological diversity of our country - a function that grows more important as unprotected natural habitat areas continue to disappear.

Within California alone, habitat loss is great. Eighty percent of its coastal wetlands and 94% of its interior wetlands are gone. These losses have resulted in over 250 plants and animals being listed as California endangered species, including the Tidewater Goby, last found in this estuary in 1980.

In its broadest sense, the term biological diversity or biodiversity includes a variety of ecological communities and a variety of different species within those communities. The ecological communities preserved in the Redwood National and State Parks include the ocean or marine environment, riverside or riparian habitats, estuaries, wetlands, prairies and oak woodlands as well as old growth and second growth forests.

It is this variation of habitats that allows plant and animal species to thrive. Maintaining and improving the health of these and other ecosystems for future generations is one of the goals of the National Park Service.

YOU CAN HELP

When the environment or any part of it is in trouble, everyone suffers, whether we're aware of it or not. You can help by providing for wildlife in your backyard, gardens and fields.

Putting up nesting boxes specifically sized for native birds, leaving dead trees standing to provide natural habitat for wildlife, and planting native vegetation in gardens and yards can provide home-sites, food and protection for wildlife. Individually, these actions may seem small, but they are cumulative and are all part of responsible land and resource use.

