

DOCENT GUIDE

FIELD TRIPS: BIRD-WATCHING STATION

(Note: This guide is for docents' optional use. The best learning come when the docent asks interesting questions for the students to answer, rather than telling the students something. Docents can develop their own questions to ask, and will have their own style of sharing their enthusiasm for the wetlands birds.)

GOALS:

- To learn why birds are important to our environment
- To learn why our sloughs are important to birds
- To learn to use binoculars to watch birds
- To identify some of the Watsonville Wetlands birds and learn interesting facts about their behavior

INTRODUCTION:

Many birds in the Watsonville Wetlands live here year-around. Other birds travel thousands of miles - from Mexico to Alaska and back. They rest, feed and breed in our sloughs.

[What are sloughs?](#) (Ponds that may dry up in a drought.)

[What is a drought?](#) (A time of less rainfall than normal.)

Is the Watsonville slough water fresh or salt? (This water is fresh; Elkhorn Slough near Moss Landing has salt water.)

Why are the Watsonville Wetlands important for birds?

(This is the second largest fresh-water slough system along the entire coast. The largest is near the Oregon border. Birds flying from Mexico to Alaska that need fresh water might not be able to fly all the way to the next sloughs. They need the Watsonville sloughs to rest, feed, and have their young.)

Where might we look for birds? (In the air, in bushes and trees, on or near the water. We might also see cliff swallows nesting under the eaves of Pajaro Valley H.S.)

Some of the most commonly-seen birds:

- In or near the water: a snowy or great white egret, a great blue heron, mallard ducks or coots.

- In or above the fields: song sparrow, red-winged blackbird, red-tailed hawk, white-tailed kite, cliff swallow.

DEMONSTRATION OF BINOCULARS

The students hang the binoculars around their necks.

The docent demonstrates how to adjust the lenses, and how to spot a bird and bring the binoculars up to look at

it. The plasticized *Birds of the Monterey Bay* folders are used for reference. (Note that water birds are on one side of the folder; field birds are on the other side. The birds are arranged from smallest in the upper left-hand corner, to largest in the lower right-hand corner.) The students also can consult the binders with sheets showing birds of the Watsonville Wetlands.

- What is the difference between a snowy egret and a great white egret? (A snowy egret is smaller and has a black bill; a great white egret is bigger and has a yellow bill.)

- How wide are the wings of a great blue heron? (6 feet. Its wings are only 4-6" when the heron comes out of the egg; in just 60 days, the wingspread of a great blue heron grows from 6 inches to 6 feet!)

- Brown pelicans live by the ocean; white pelicans live in the sloughs. How do they catch fish differently? (Brown pelicans dive at the fish from the air; white pelicans catch them while swimming on the top of the water)

- What do ducks eat? (Tiny duckweed floating on top of the water; invertebrates from the muddy bottom)

- Why do cormorants hold their wings out to dry? (So that they can dive deeper underwater, their outer feathers aren't waterproof, and need drying out)

- Why are coots also called "mud hens"? (Coots don't have webbed feet like a duck, but three toes like a chicken, so they are sometimes called "mud hens." When they fight, they lean back in the water and kick at each other with their feet!)

THANKS FOR COMING TO ENJOY THE BIRDS OF THE
WATSONVILLE WETLANDS!!