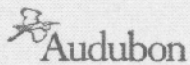




San Fernando Valley Audubon Society  
[www.sfvaudubon.org](http://www.sfvaudubon.org)



Los Angeles Audubon Society  
[www.laaudubon.org](http://www.laaudubon.org)

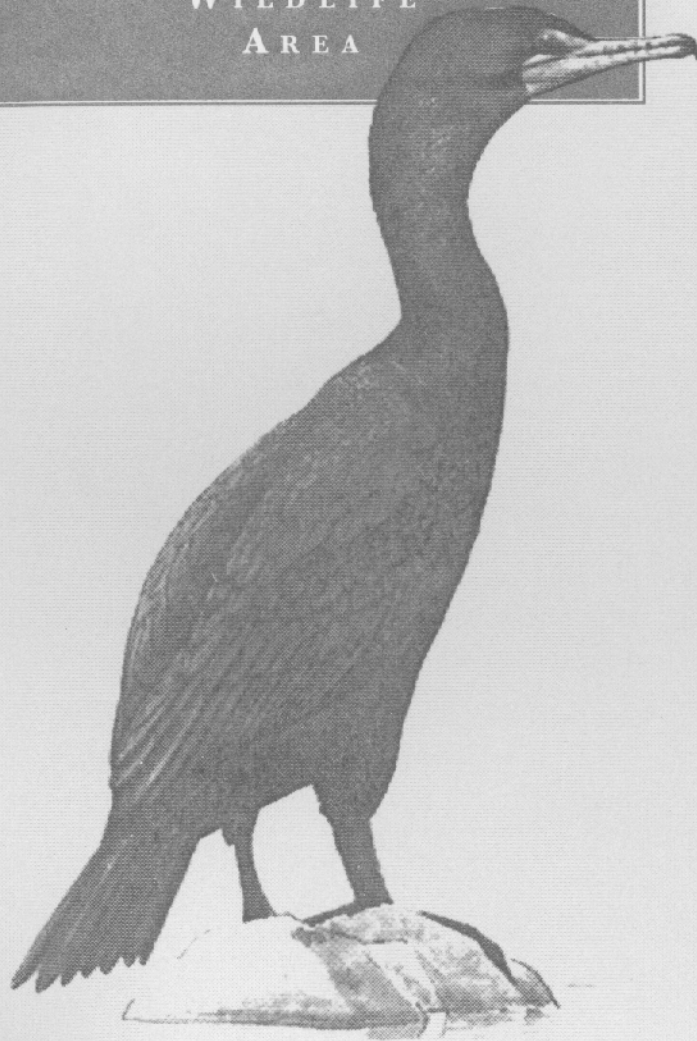


Audubon California  
[www.audubon-ca.org](http://www.audubon-ca.org)



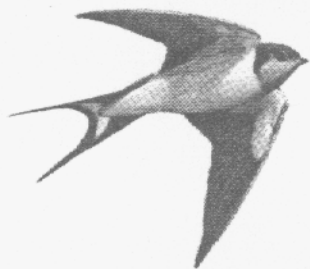
Resource Conservation District  
of the Santa Monica Mountains  
[www.rcdsmm.org](http://www.rcdsmm.org)

BIRDS OF THE  
SEPULVEDA BASIN  
WILDLIFE  
AREA



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SFV Audubon Society



This booklet is our gift to the children who participate in the Sepulveda Basin Environmental Education Program's class field trips to the wildlife reserve. It is given as a keepsake of their experience in nature.

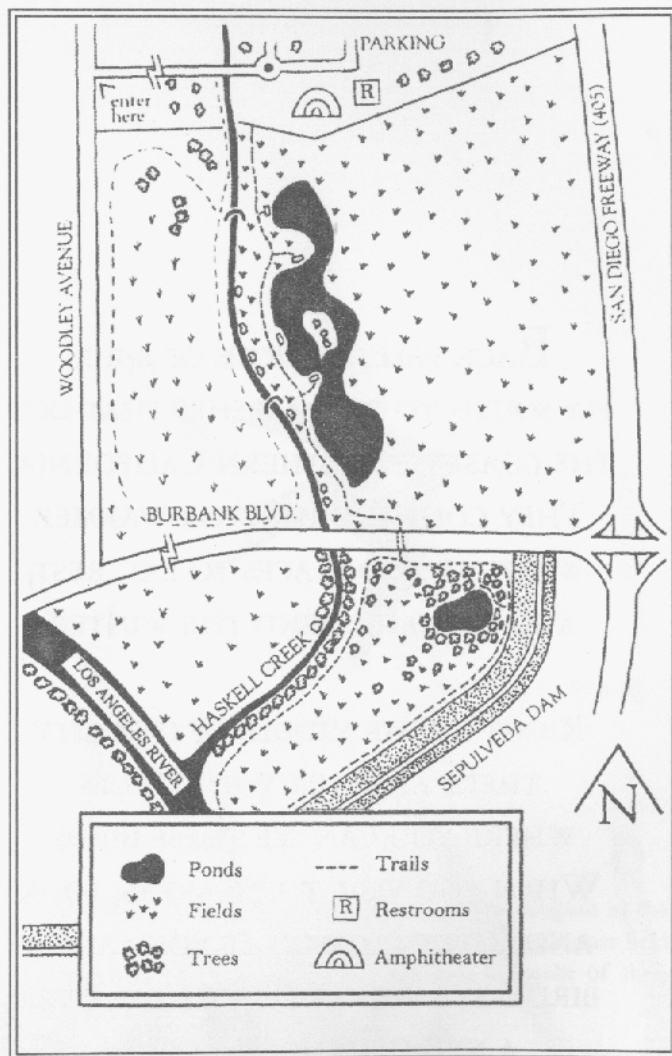
San Fernando Valley Audubon  
[www.sfvaudubon.org](http://www.sfvaudubon.org)

EACH FALL, MILLIONS OF BIRDS  
FLY SOUTH TO THE MARSHES THAT DOT  
THE COAST OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.  
THEY COME LOOKING FOR WARMER  
WEATHER AND PLACES TO EAT, REST,  
AND PERHAPS SPEND THE WINTER.

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR CITY  
THERE ARE STILL WILD PLACES  
WHERE YOU CAN SEE THESE BIRDS.  
WHEN YOU VISIT THESE AREAS, LOOK  
AND LISTEN CLOSELY. IF YOU TAKE A  
BIRD'S-EYE VIEW, YOU WILL DISCOVER  
A NEIGHBORHOOD AS BUSY  
AS YOUR OWN.

## SEPULVEDA BASIN WILDFIRE AREA

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY



**Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve**

One hundred years ago, the San Fernando Valley was a wide open plain, dotted with farms and crisscrossed by the Los Angeles River and its streams. The Valley's wetlands provided a haven for millions of birds traveling between breeding grounds in Canada and Alaska and wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America. Today the Valley is home to more than one and a half million people, and most sections of the once-wild river have been enclosed in cement walls. But the Wildlife Area still provides important habitat – home, food and shelter – for a variety of birds.

The Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area is land that the City of Los Angeles has set aside for the protection of native animals and plants. This 108-acre refuge includes a lake, large open areas, small ponds and a flowing creek. Canada Geese graze in nearby fields, long-billed shorebirds probe for tiny animals in the mud along the edge of the water, and birds of prey hunt for rodents, reptiles and small birds in the grassy uplands.

More than two hundred species of birds have been seen at the Sepulveda Wildlife area. This guide will introduce you to some of the more common ones.

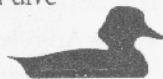


**B**irds spend much of their day looking for food. In this guide, we have given names to some of the ways birds go about finding food in order to help you find and identify them. Ask yourself, "What is that bird doing?" and you'll be on your way to knowing which bird it is.

**Stabbers and Grabbers** wade in shallow water, stretching out their long necks to grab fish with their long, pointed bills.



**Surface Divers** float on top of the water, then dive to catch fish or pull up plants.



**Dabbling Ducks** turn bottoms-up in shallow water to feed on plants and small animals.



**Plunge Divers** spot a fish from the air, then dive headfirst into the water to catch it.



**Gulls** will eat most anything that comes their way, from fish to french fries.



**Long-billed Shorebirds** use their bills to poke into nooks and crannies in the rocks, or probe deep in the mud where others can't reach.



**Short-billed Shorebirds** probe just below the surface of the ground looking for tiny mollusks and crustaceans.



**Birds of Prey** are hunters. They have strong claws with which to nab their prey and sharp, hooked bills to help them eat it.



**Scavengers** eat dead animals and other leftovers.

**Specialists** feed only on very specific things, such as flower nectar or insects.



**Generalists** will eat a variety of foods.

**Seedeaters** have strong, short bills with which to crack open seeds.



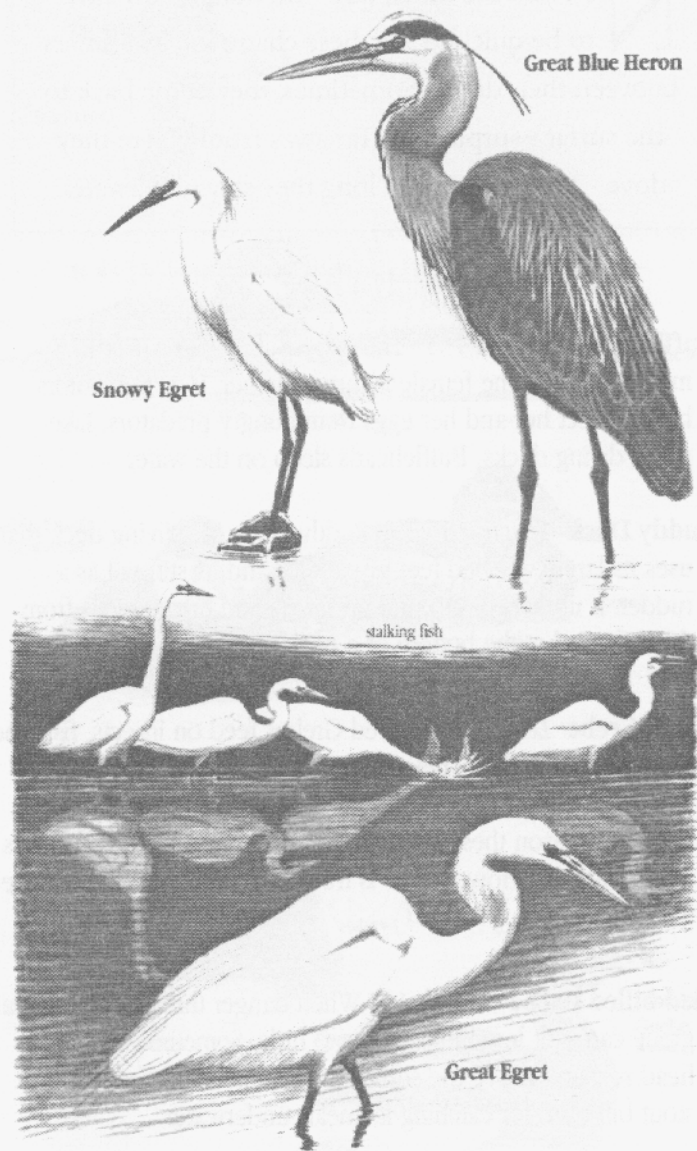
## STABBERS AND GRABBERS

**T**hese large wading birds have long, pointed bills which they use to spear their prey or to snatch it up. Their long legs help them to stay dry while they make their living stalking fish and other small animals in streams, marshes and ponds.

**Great Blue Heron** *Length 46"* Standing still as a statue, the Great Blue Heron waits for a fish to swim by, then quickly strikes out with its long, pointed bill. It tosses the fish in the air, catches it, and swallows it head first.

**Snowy Egret** *Length 24"* The Snowy Egret hunts for fish in shallow water. This member of the heron family may stand in one spot waiting for a fish, or it may walk along stirring up fish with its bright yellow feet. One hundred years ago, hunters brought these small, snow-white egrets close to extinction by killing them in order to use their feathers to decorate ladies' hats.

**Great Egret** *Length 39"* The Great Egret slowly stalks its prey in shallow water. With its long neck, it can strike quickly to snatch up fish. Early members of the Audubon Society helped to pass laws to stop the killing of these graceful birds for their plumes. Today, the Great Egret is the symbol of the National Audubon Society.



## SURFACE DIVERS

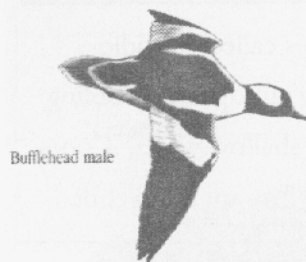
**N**ow you see them, now you don't! You have to be quick to see these champion swimmers between their dives. Sometimes, they come back to the surface surprisingly far away from where they dove. Try to time how long they stay underwater.

**Bufflehead** *Length 13 1/2"* The male Bufflehead has bold markings while the female is much plainer. Her drab colors help protect her and her eggs from hungry predators. Like many diving ducks, Buffleheads sleep on the water.

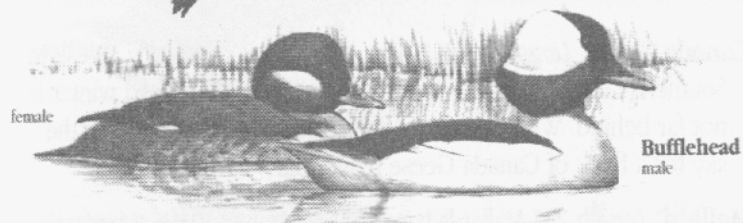
**Ruddy Duck** *Length 15"* The Ruddy Duck is a diving duck that uses its large, webbed feet as paddles and its stiff tail as a rudder. It uses its bill to pull up plants and tiny animals from the soft mud at the bottom of a pond or lake.

**Eared Grebe** *Length 13"* Eared Grebes feed on insects, fish and other small animals. They capture some of their prey after an underwater chase. Don't be fooled by the name. In the breeding season these birds develop beautiful, golden feathers over their ears. However, as is true of all birds, you cannot see their ears!

**Pied-billed Grebe** *Length 13"* When danger threatens, this small grebe can sink low in the water to hide. Sometimes only its head remains above the surface. The Pied-billed Grebe has a stout bill used for catching its meals underwater.

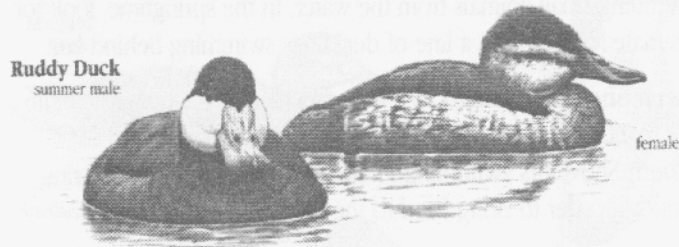


Bufflehead male



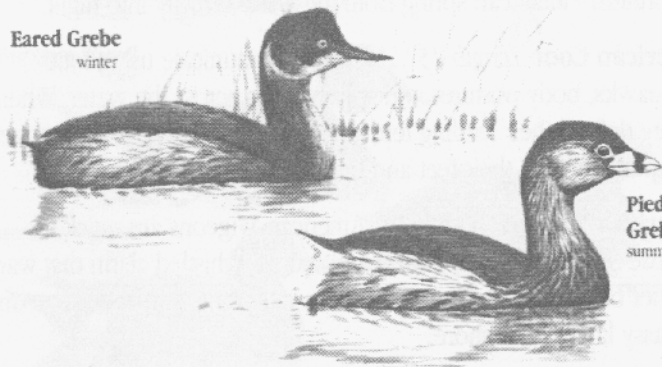
female

Bufflehead male



Ruddy Duck  
summer male

female



Eared Grebe  
winter

Pied-billed  
Grebe  
summer

## CANADA GOOSE, DABBLING DUCKS AND COOT

**D**abbling ducks, sometimes called "puddle ducks," feed by tipping tail-up and dabbling for insects, seeds and snails in shallow water. Coots have bills like ducks, but their feet are not webbed.

**Canada Goose** *Length 25-45"* The appearance of Canada Geese in Southern California is a sure sign that fall has arrived and winter is not far behind. When you hear their musical honking, search the sky for a flock of Canada Geese flying in a V-formation.

**Mallard** *Length 23"* Mallards have flat bills that are shaped perfectly for straining small animals from the water. In the springtime, look for the female Mallard with a line of ducklings swimming behind her.

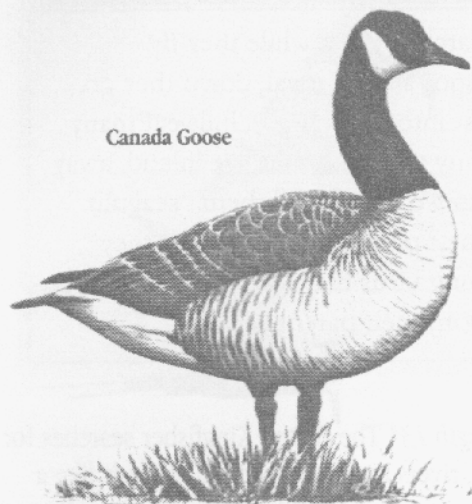
**Northern Shoveler** *Length 19"* With their big bills, shovelers strain small plants and animals from the water. Watch for groups of Northern Shovelers swimming in circles in shallow water, stirring up mud in order to bring food to the surface.

**Northern Pintail** *Length Male 26", Female 20"* This dabbling duck was named for its long, pointed tail. Like other dabbling ducks, the Northern Pintail can spring from the water directly into flight.

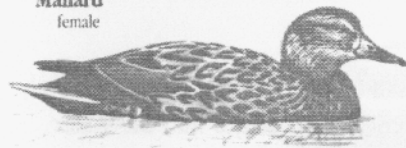
**American Coot** *Length 15 1/2"* Coots communicate using loud squawks, body postures and splashy runs across the water. When they defend their feeding territory, they grab, stab and slap at their opponents with their feet and bills.

**American Wigeon** *Length 19"* American Wigeons are quick to sense danger and may sound a two-note, whistled alarm that warns other birds nearby. They eat underwater plants and also graze on grassy lawns near shore.

Canada Goose



Mallard  
female



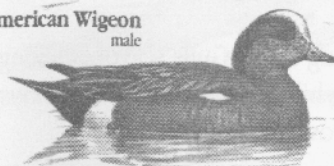
Northern Shoveler  
male



Northern Pintail  
male



American Wigeon  
male



Mallard  
male dabbling



American Coot



## PLUNGE DIVERS AND GULLS

**P**lunge divers search for fish while they fly.

When they spot a likely meal, down they go, *kersplash!*, headfirst into the water. Gulls eat many kinds of food. Many gulls nest and live inland, away from the ocean, so we do not call them "seagulls."

They change their plumage (feathers) as they grow up. The young birds may look very different from their parents.

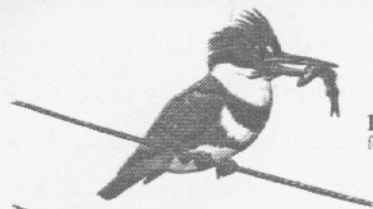
**Belted Kingfisher** *Length 13"* The Belted Kingfisher searches for fish in lakes, lagoons, rivers and ponds. Its call sounds like a loud rattle. Kingfishers can dive for fish from a perch, or hover and then dive.

**Forster's Tern** *Length 14 1/2"* When a Forster's Tern spots a meal, it hovers in the air for a moment, then plunges into the water. Sometimes it comes up with a shiny, wiggling minnow or other small fish.

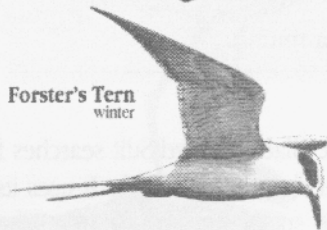
**Caspian Tern** *Length 21"* Terns are related to gulls, but their wings and bills are more pointed. The Caspian Tern is the largest of the terns. Its red bill is distinctive. When fishing, Caspian Terns hover and dive.

**Bonaparte's Gull** *Length 13 1/2"* Bonaparte's Gulls are small gulls that feed while floating on or fluttering over the water. They eat small animals that they pick from the surface.

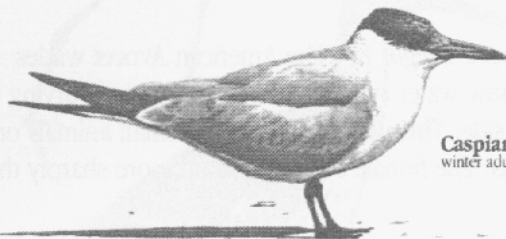
**Ring-billed Gull** *Length 17 1/2"* Ring-billed Gulls scavenge along the water's edge. The adult Ring-billed Gull has a conspicuous black ring near the tip of its yellow bill.



**Belted Kingfisher**  
female

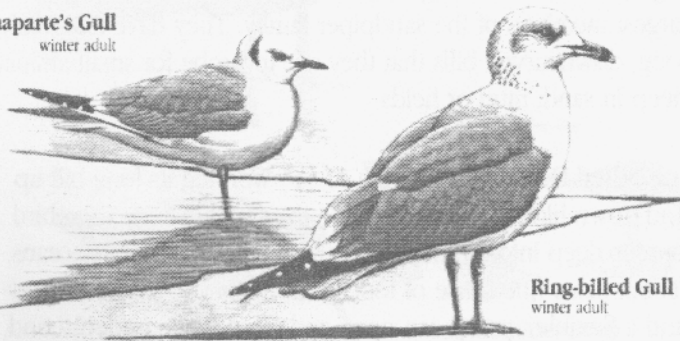


**Forster's Tern**  
winter



**Caspian Tern**  
winter adult

**Bonaparte's Gull**  
winter adult



**Ring-billed Gull**  
winter adult



## LONG-BILLED SHOREBIRDS

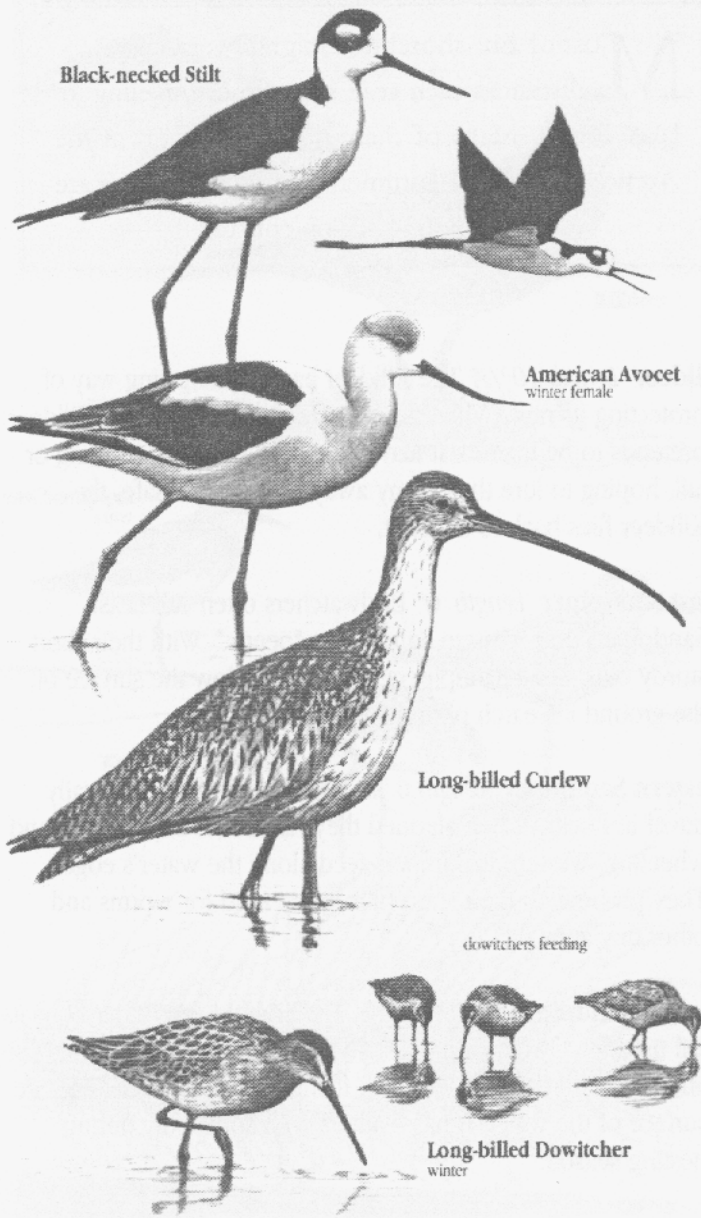
Notice the many different sizes and shapes of the shorebirds' bills. By using their bills to feed at different depths in the sand and mud, they avoid competition and share the food available in the marsh.

**Black-necked Stilt** *Length 14"* The Black-necked Stilt searches for food in water that is too deep for short-legged birds. It uses its thin, black bill to pick insects and snails out of the water. When you see their long, pink legs, you will know why they are called "stilts."

**American Avocet** *Length 18"* The American Avocet wades through shallow water sweeping its long, upward curving bill from side to side. This motion stirs up the small animals on which it feeds. The female's bill curves up more sharply than the male's.

**Long-billed Curlew** *Length 23"* Long-billed Curlews are the largest members of the sandpiper family. They have extremely long, downcurved bills that they use to probe for small animals deep in sand, mud or fields.

**Long-billed Dowitcher** *Length 11 1/2"* Working its long bill up and down like a sewing machine needle, this large shorebird probes deep into the mud to feed on worms and crustaceans. Its bill has a fine sense of touch that helps it to locate its prey and a flexible tip that can open and close while underground.



## SHORT-BILLED SHOREBIRDS

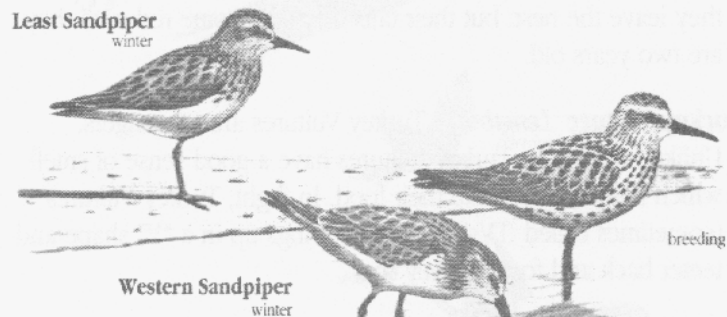
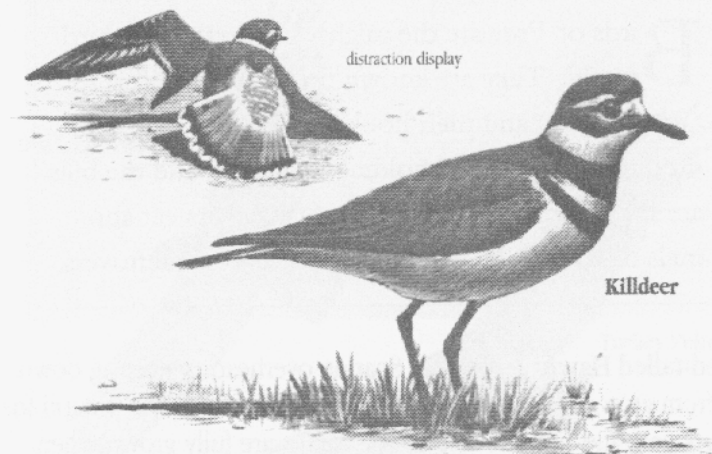
Most of our shorebirds migrate very long distances each year, sometimes traveling in large flocks. Many of them nest within or near the Arctic Circle in the summer months when days are long and food is plentiful.

**Killdeer** *Length 10 1/2"* The Killdeer has an interesting way of protecting its nest. When danger approaches, the adult Killdeer pretends to be injured. It leaves the nest, dragging its wing or tail, hoping to lure the enemy away. When all is safe, the Killdeer flies back to the nest.

**Least Sandpiper** *Length 6"* Birdwatchers often call Least Sandpipers and Western Sandpipers "peeps." With their short sturdy bills, Least Sandpipers probe just below the surface of the ground in search of tiny animals.

**Western Sandpiper** *Length 6 1/2"* Western Sandpipers usually travel in flocks. When alarmed they rise in the air, banking and wheeling. Western Sandpipers feed along the water's edge. They probe with their short bills in the mud for worms and other tiny animals.

**Spotted Sandpiper** *Length 7 1/2"* The Spotted Sandpiper bobs its tail up and down as it moves along the water's edge. It eats fish and small animals and can pick flying insects off rocks and the surface of the water. It has feathers with spots only during nesting season.



## BIRDS OF PREY AND SCAVENGERS

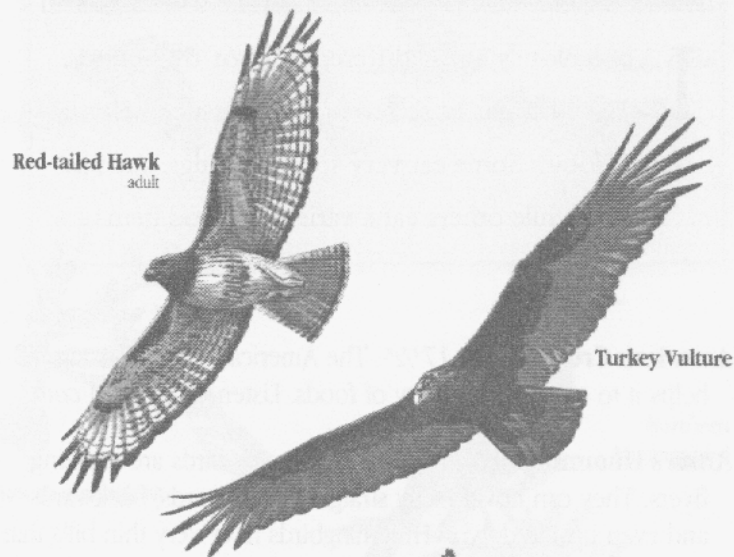
**B**irds of Prey are the mighty hunters of the bird world. They are known for their powerful talons (claws) and their hooked bills. The talons are used for catching and holding their prey, and the bills are for tearing apart the meat. Scavengers eat animals that have already died as well as other leftovers.

**Red-tailed Hawk** *Length 22"* Soaring overhead or peering down from atop a high perch, Red-tailed Hawks search the ground for rodents and reptiles. The young hawks are fully grown when they leave the nest, but their tails do not become red until they are two years old.

**Turkey Vulture** *Length 27"* Turkey Vultures are scavengers. Unlike most birds, Turkey Vultures have a good sense of smell which helps them locate their food. In flight, Turkey Vultures (sometimes called 'TVs') hold their wings up in a "V" shape and teeter back and forth as they soar.

**American Kestrel** *Length 10½"* Kestrels are known for their speed and agility in flight. While hunting, kestrels can hover over a spot on the ground by flying into the wind at the same speed at which the wind blows. Kestrels catch small mammals, small birds, reptiles and insects.

**Loggerhead Shrike** *Length 9"* These small, masked hunters scan their territory from lookout perches, then swoop down on their prey which includes insects, reptiles, rodents and small birds. Shrikes often pin their prey on thorns or barbed-wire fences to eat or save for later.



Red-tailed Hawk  
adult

Turkey Vulture



kestrel  
hovering

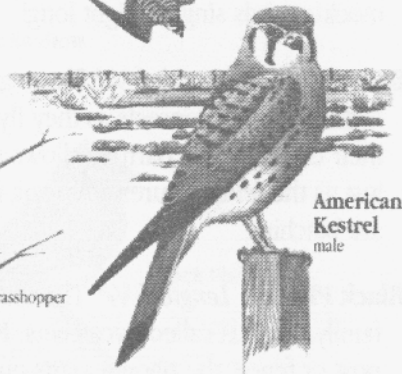


stooping

Loggerhead Shrike



grasshopper



American  
Kestrel  
male

## SPECIALISTS AND GENERALISTS

Look closely at the different bills of these birds. Each bird has a different “tool” which helps it obtain food. Some eat very specific things, such as nectar, while others eat a variety of food items.

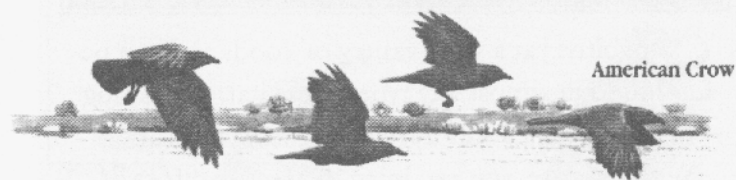
**American Crow** *Length 17 1/2"* The American Crow's strong bill helps it to eat a wide variety of foods. Listen for its loud *caw*.

**Anna's Hummingbird** *Length 4"* These tiny birds are amazing flyers. They can hover or fly straight up, forwards, backwards and even upside down! Hummingbirds have very thin bills that they use to sip nectar from flowers. They also catch tiny, flying insects.

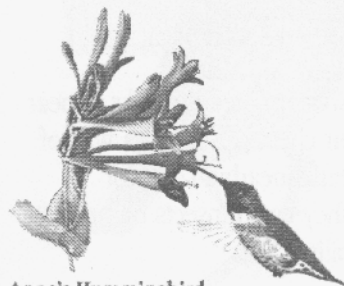
**Northern Mockingbird** *Length 10"* The mockingbird can imitate songs of many different birds as well as other sounds. Can you count how many different melodies it sings? Sometimes mockingbirds sing all night long!

**Barn Swallow** *Length 6 3/4"* These graceful flyers sweep back and forth hunting for insects as they fly. They capture the insects in their broad beaks. Barn Swallows arrive here from the South just as the temperatures are rising in the spring and insects are hatching.

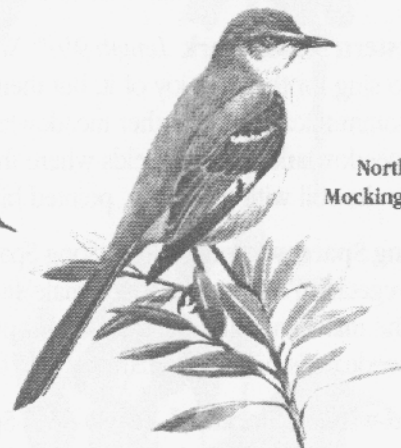
**Black Phoebe** *Length 6 3/4"* The Black Phoebe belongs to a family of birds called flycatchers. From its perch on a branch, post or fence, the phoebe darts out to snap up a flying insect, often returning to the same perch to eat it.



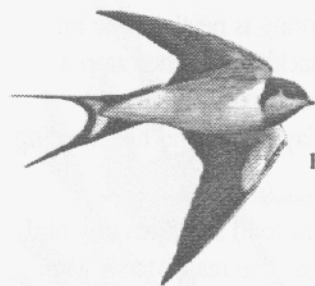
American Crow



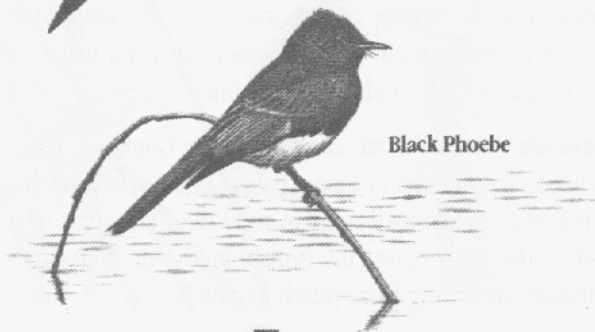
Anna's Hummingbird



Northern Mockingbird



Barn Swallow



Black Phoebe

## SONGBIRDS

**S**ongbirds eat a wide variety of foods and can be found in almost any type of habitat. Birds sing to attract mates and to stake out their territories. With practice, you can learn to identify different kinds of birds by their songs.

**Western Meadowlark** *Length 9 1/2"* Western Meadowlarks appear to sing for the pure joy of it, but their cheerful song is a way of communicating with other meadowlarks nearby. Look for meadowlarks in open fields where they catch insects by probing in the soil with their long, pointed bills.

**Song Sparrow** *Length 6 1/4"* Song Sparrows live in brushy vegetation near water. The female sings only before nesting, but the male sings all year around. Although they have a strong, seedeater's bill, Song Sparrows also feed on insects.

**Red-winged Blackbird** *Length 8 3/4"* Spring is nesting time for most birds. The male Red-winged Blackbird perches atop a cattail stalk and fluffs his feathers to display his bright red shoulder patches. He sings and displays to defend his breeding territory and to attract a mate.

**Marsh Wren** *Length 5"* While singing its loud song this tiny bird often remains hidden among the reeds. The male Marsh Wren builds many football-shaped nests to attract a mate and accompanies her as she chooses one.

**Common Yellowthroat** *Length 5"* The Common Yellowthroat belongs to a group of insect eating birds called warblers. Watch for Common Yellowthroats in reeds and tall grass near water. When the male courts the female in spring, he follows her closely, swooping from perch to perch.

Western  
Meadowlark



Song  
Sparrow



male  
displaying

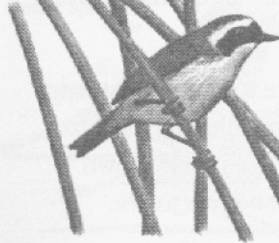
Marsh Wren



Red-winged  
Blackbird  
male



Common  
Yellowthroat  
male



## SEED EATERS

**S**eeds are an abundant source of food. Most seedeaters crack seeds open with their heavy bills. Others swallow the seeds whole.

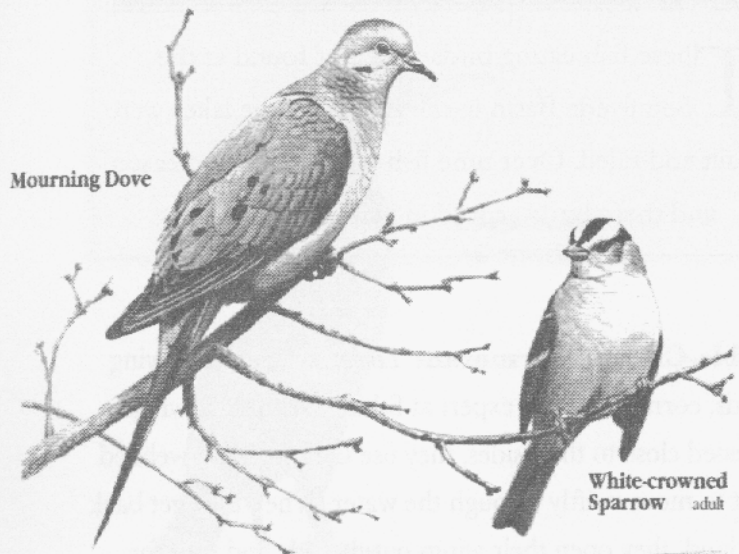
**Mourning Dove** *Length 12"* The cooing of this dove may sound sad, but is actually a sound made when the dove is claiming a home territory or attracting a mate. The Mourning Dove's bill is not designed for seed cracking. It swallows seeds whole. You can see Mourning Doves throughout the year in most city neighborhoods.

**White-crowned Sparrow** *Length 7"* Often you will hear a singing White-crowned Sparrow before you see it. Listen for its sweet song. Young birds have a brown crown (top of the head), not white! In Southern California, this sparrow can be seen from late September through April.

**American Goldfinch** *Length 5"* This little seedeater was named for the bright yellow feathers that the male wears in spring and summer. The female American Goldfinch builds a nest in the fork of a tree. The male may help by bringing nesting materials to her and by feeding her while she sits on her eggs.

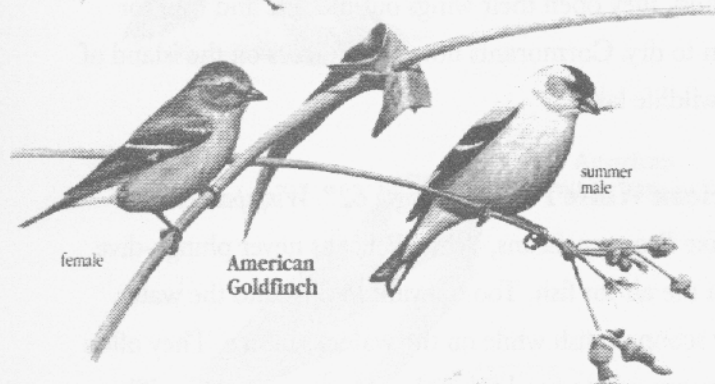
**House Sparrow** *Length 6 1/4"* House Sparrows use their strong, cone-shaped bills to crack open seeds. They frequently build their nests in street signs or on people's houses.

**House Finch** *Length 6"* House Finches have thick bills that help them to crack seeds. The males are brown with bright red or orange on their heads and chests. The females wear brown stripes which make them harder for their enemies to see.



Mourning Dove

White-crowned Sparrow adult



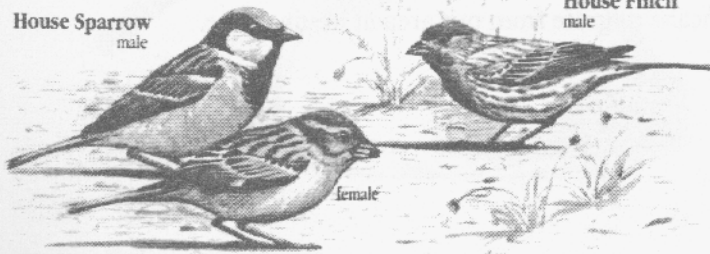
female

American Goldfinch

summer male

House Sparrow male

House Finch male



female

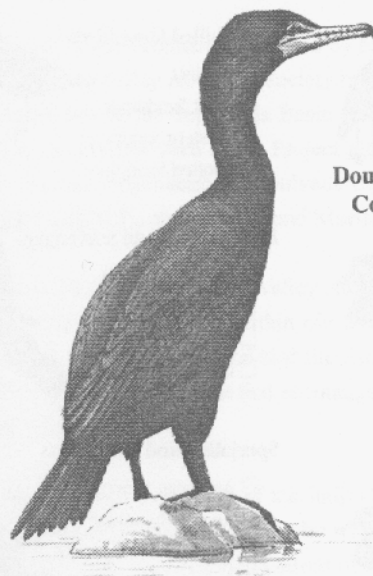
## NEW BIRDS OF THE SEPULVEDA BASIN

These fish-eating birds were not found at the Sepulveda Basin in the first years the lakes were built and filled. Over time fish populations increased and these birds arrived in increasing numbers.

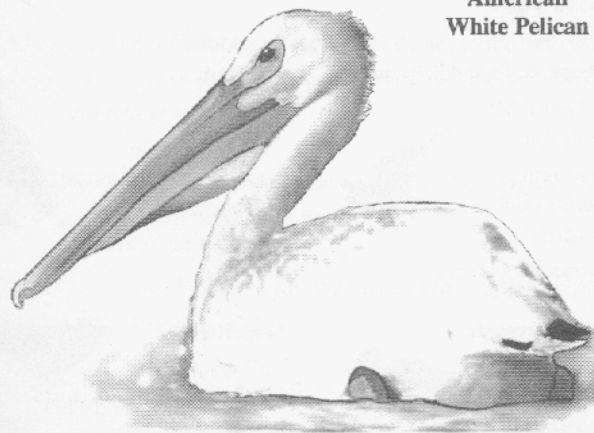
**Double-Crested Cormorant** *Length 32"* Surface diving birds, cormorants are expert at fishing. With their wings pressed close to their sides, they use their legs and webbed feet to move swiftly through the water. When they get back on land, they open their wings out the side and wait for them to dry. Cormorants now nest in trees on the island of the wildlife lake.

**American White Pelican** *Length 62" Wingspan 108"*

Unlike Brown pelicans, White Pelicans never plunge-dive from the air for fish. Too buoyant to dive into the water, they scoop up fish while on the water's surface. They often use teamwork to herd fish to be able to reach them. The pelicans migrate from our area at nesting time.



Double-crested  
Cormorant



American  
White Pelican

## CHECKLIST

### Stabbers and Grabbers

- Great Blue Heron
- Snowy Egret
- Great Egret



### Surface Divers

- Bufflehead
- Ruddy Duck
- Eared Grebe
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Double-crested Cormorant



### Canada Goose, Dabbling Ducks and Coot

- Canada Goose
- Mallard
- Northern Shoveler
- Northern Pintail
- American Coot
- American Wigeon



### Plunge Divers, Gulls and Pelicans

- Belted Kingfisher
- Forster's Tern
- Caspian Tern
- Bonaparte's Gull
- Ring-billed Gull
- American White Pelican



### Long-billed Shorebirds

- Black-necked Stilt
- American Avocet
- Long-billed Curlew
- Long-billed Dowitcher



### Short-billed Shorebirds

- Killdeer
- Least Sandpiper
- Western Sandpiper
- Spotted Sandpiper



### Birds of Prey and Scavengers

- Red-tailed Hawk
- Turkey Vulture
- American Kestrel
- Loggerhead Shrike



### Specialists and Generalists

- American Crow
- Anna's Hummingbird
- Northern Mockingbird
- Barn Swallow
- Black Phoebe



### Songbirds

- Western Meadowlark
- Song Sparrow
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Marsh Wren
- Common Yellowthroat



### Seedeaters

- Mourning Dove
- White-crowned Sparrow
- American Goldfinch
- House Sparrow
- House Finch



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The mission of San Fernando Valley Audubon Society is to reserve and enhance the natural habitat within our territory, to increase the public's awareness and appreciation of bird life and the natural environment, and to create social environment that encourages individual development and participation.

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