California Partners in Flight (CalPIF) is a voluntary coalition of state and federal agencies and private conservation organizations dedicated to conserving bird populations and their habitats.

PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO) is dedicated to conserving birds, other wildlife and ecosystems through innovative scientific research and effective outreach.

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Introduction

Birds are the most familiar and widely enjoyed wildlife in North America. Birds are generally active during the day, visually conspicuous, and highly vocal. These characteristics mean that birds are more easily observed than other type of wildlife.

Birds play an important role in control of forest and agricultural pests. Some of the birds in this guide, such as Red-shouldered Hawks and Great Horned Owls, eat rodents. Other birds, such as Western Bluebirds and Tree Swallows, eat insects. By reducing pest populations on your property, birds can help reduce the need for costly, unsafe chemical sprays.

What is riparian habitat?

The plant life that borders creeks, rivers, lakes, and other waterbodies is known as riparian vegetation. Riparian vegetation provides essential water, food, nesting sites, stopover sites during migration, and places to live during the winter.
for numerous bird species. In other words, riparian vegetation is an important habitat for many birds.

Riparian habitat that supports healthy bird populations also supports other wildlife. More than 225 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians depend on California's riparian habitats. The presence of water also promotes a diversity of native trees, shrubs, and grasses including willows, cottonwoods, oaks, wild rose, and California blackberry.

A diversity of plant species, sizes, and shapes will form multiple vegetation layers that offer a variety of feeding and nesting locations for birds. Certain bird species prefer to nest high in the tree canopy, such as many birds of prey, while others prefer to nest in the middle of a tree or the midstory. Certain bird species nest on the ground or in a low-growing shrub. These species are known as understory nesters. Some birds, such as woodpeckers, are cavity nesters and select holes in trunks or limbs of trees to raise their
young. Finally, some species nest in non-traditional locations, including creek banks, bridges, and ledges.

**How to Use this Guide**
This guide was written for landowners and others who manage creek, or riparian, habitat. Its small size makes it an ideal travel companion for walks along creeks and other waterways. Use the photographs to identify the different bird species you see during your walk, and to read about their requirements. Are there some simple actions that you can take to make your land a better home for birds? Even small steps can make a difference in birds' lives!

**Organization of the Guide**
Not all bird species found along California creeks are included in this guide. Instead, the guide focuses on 61 commonly seen species, which are organized taxonomically within each chapter.
The emphasis is on adult birds in the breeding season; many species look different in other seasons, when they adopt a duller plumage. Also, birds in their first year of life often look different from adults.

More extensive information, including images of these birds in different seasons, can be found in bird field guides. Two excellent guides are: *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America* and *Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of North America*. Additional information on the habitat requirements of these species can be found in The Riparian Bird Conservation Plan (see references on page 87).

The bird species in this guide are organized into chapters according to their nesting locations in creek habitat. Different bird species select different locations within a habitat to build their nests and raise young. Five nest locations are presented: understory, midstory, canopy, cavity, and non-traditional. Each chapter contains an introductory page describing the habitat features...
for a particular nest location, followed by the species accounts. A checklist on pages 83-86 organizes the bird species within this guide according to nesting location.

**Species Accounts**
The species accounts are informative profiles of common creek birds. Each species account includes an *Identification* section. When males and females of the same species have different

![Bird Image](image-url)

*Black-headed Grosbeak (female)*
James R. Gallagher, Sea and Sage Audubon
plumages, each is described. Some of the terms used to describe the various parts of birds are outlined in the photograph on page 9. The average length from tip of bill to tip of tail is given in inches.

The *Range* section describes where each species can be found and the time of year they occur in California. *Resident* birds occur in California year-round whereas *breeders* occur only during the nesting season. Birds are very mobile and some species move around quite a bit. As a result, they could easily turn up in regions that are beyond the limits of their described range. Therefore, the range section should serve as a general guide to a species’ distribution.

The *Diet* section describes the main food items of each species. The *Habitat Improvement Tip* describes ways in which you can manage the land along your creek to benefit birds and other wildlife. These tips are effective and complementary to riparian habitats throughout the state.
Nesting Locations
and Species Accounts
I. Understory/Ground Nesters

*What do an Allen's Hummingbird and a California Quail have in common?*

Both nest in the dense undergrowth along creeks (understory). Understory vegetation provides protection and food resources for very different types of birds. Though the presence of a healthy understory is essential to most breeding riparian birds, it is sometimes overlooked in habitat restoration projects.

So, what do birds need from the understory and how can you help enhance this important vegetation layer along your creeks?

Understory = the underlying layer of vegetation.
Need: Thick, low-growing vegetation in which to hide nests, forage, and feed young.

How you can help

• Plant dense clumps of low-growing shrubs and tall forbs that are native to your region.
• Do not mow during the breeding season. If you must mow, mow before the breeding season and keep vegetation under 6” in order to discourage birds from nesting.
• Plant armored vegetation, like California blackberry, to protect nesting birds from predators.

Need: Safe travel routes between the understory and midstory layer, or habitat structure.

How you can help

• Allow the understory to connect with the midstory layer. Climbing plants that are native to your region can enhance habitat structure.
Mallard
(Anas platyrhynchos)

Identification: 23" Male (shown): Glossy green head and white neck ring. Chestnut chest, yellowish bill. Female: Brown with a whitish tail. Both sexes have a blue wing patch in flight.

Range: Resident throughout California.

Diet: Plant material, insects, crustaceans.

Habitat Improvement Tip: Between March and July, protect potential nest sites along creek banks from disturbances, such as brush clearing.
**Spotted Sandpiper**  
(*Actitis macularia*)

**Identification:** 7” Upperparts olive-brown, underparts whitish. White eyebrow and dark eyeline. Breast spots in summer only. Bobs tail when feeding and walking.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, crustaceans, other invertebrates.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Maintain exposed gravel bars along creeks and ponds with some sparse vegetation, such as grasses and lupines.

Range: Resident throughout California.

Diet: Seeds, leaves.

Habitat Improvement Tip: Plant dense clumps of shrubs and trees. Use native vegetation such as California blackberry and oaks.
Allen's Hummingbird
(Selasphorus sasin)


**Range:** *Breeder* primarily in coastal areas.

**Diet:** Nectar, insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant native flowering plants like monkeyflower and penstemon. Create potential nest sites by planting California blackberry.
Verdin

*(Auriparus aviceps)*

**Identification:** 5" Gray overall with yellow head and throat. Chestnut patch on shoulder sometimes visible.

**Range:** *Resident* in the southern Mojave, Colorado, and Sonoran deserts.

**Diet:** Insects, berries, nectar.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant clumps of shrubs. Use native vegetation such as blue palo verde, scrub oak, smoke tree, and mesquite.
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher
(Polioptila melanura)

**Identification:** 5" Upperparts gray, underparts whitish. Long, black tail with white outer edge. *Male* (shown): Black cap in summer only.

**Range:** *Resident* in the Mojave, Colorado, and Sonoran deserts.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** During the fall and winter months, control and eradicate exotic vegetation like tamarisk and arundo.
Swainson's Thrush
(Catharus ustulatus)

**Identification:** 7” Tan chest, face, and eyering. Head and upperparts brown, underparts whitish. Dark spots on chest.

**Range:** Breeder primarily in montane and coastal areas throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, berries.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant and maintain a mix of low-growing native plants including salmonberry and hedge nettle.
Bell's Vireo

*(Vireo bellii)*

**Identification:** 5" Gray bird with whitish throat and underparts. Wings and tail dark with whitish wingbar.

**Range:** *Breeder* primarily in San Diego County, with scattered breeding north to Monterey County. Formerly much more widespread.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** In winter, control and eradicate exotic vegetation like tamarisk.
Wilson's Warbler

(Wilsonia pusilla)

**Identification:** 5" Upperparts green and underparts yellow. Beady black eye. *Male* (shown): Glossy black cap. *Female:* Smaller black cap.

**Range:** *Breeder* primarily in montane and coastal areas throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Create potential nest sites by planting native plants including ferns, nettle, and California blackberry.
Common Yellowthroat
(*Geothlypis trichas*)

**Identification:** 5" Upperparts olive, throat and chest yellow. *Male* (shown): Black mask with white border.

**Range:** *Breeder* throughout the valleys and lowlands in suitable habitat.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Create potential nest sites by planting native grasses, sedges, cattails and bulrush.
Yellow-breasted Chat
(Icteria virens)

**Identification:** 8” White "spectacles" on face. Throat and chest yellow, belly white. Upperparts greyish olive.

**Range:** *Breeder* locally in California.

**Diet:** Insects, berries.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Wherever possible, widen creekside corridors by planting clumps of shrubs and trees. Use native vegetation such as willows and California blackberry.
Blue Grosbeak

(*Guiraca caerulea*)


**Range:** *Breeder* in the Central Valley and along the southern coast.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant and maintain a diverse mix of low-growing native shrubs.
Spotted Towhee
(Pipilo maculatus)

**Identification:** 9" Head, chest, and upperparts black, sides rusty. Red eyes, white spotting on wings and long, black tail. Female similar but grayish brown where male is black.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds, berries.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Create travel corridors by connecting patches of vegetation along creeksides.
Lazuli Bunting
(Passerina amoena)

**Identification:** 6" Male (shown): Head and upperparts turquoise-blue. Chest cinnamon, underparts white. Two white wingbars. Female: Upperparts brown, underparts paler brown. Two pale wingbars and pale eyering.

**Range:** Breeder locally in California.

**Diet:** Seeds, insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant and maintain a diverse mix of native low-growing shrubs.
Song Sparrow
(Melospiza melodia)

**Identification:** 6" Upperparts reddish brown with dark streaking. Gray face with dark stripes. Underparts whitish with heavy streaking, usually forming a central dark spot.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Avoid brush clearing during the breeding season (February – August).
Red-winged Blackbird

*(Agelaius phoeniceus)*

**Identification:** 9" *Male* (shown): Black overall with a bright red patch on each shoulder. *Female*: Brown overall with dark streaking on underparts.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Maintain native upland habitat adjacent to creeks.
Tricolored Blackbird
(Agelaius tricolor)

**Identification:** 9" *Male* (shown): Black overall with a deep red patch on each shoulder with a white margin. *Female:* Gray-brown overall with dark streaking on underparts.

**Range:** *Resident* in the Central Valley with scattered colonies in southern and coastal California.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Create potential nest sites by planting nettles and cattails.
Brewer's Blackbird
*(Euphagus cyanocephalus)*

**Identification:** 9" *Male* (shown): Black with yellow eyes. *Female:* Gray-brown with dark eye.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant dense clumps of shrubs and trees. Use native vegetation such as California blackberry and willows.
II. Midstory Nesters

From hummingbirds to finches, the riparian midstory provides tall shrubs and small trees in which birds hide nests and find food. The midstory grows in the shadows of tall trees and shades understory plants. The majority of birds that nest in the midstory build a cup-shaped nest on the branches of plants like willow, elderberry, or palo verde.

So, what do birds need from the midstory and how can you help enhance this essential vegetation layer along your creeks?

Midstory = the section of vegetation in a forest with more than one vertical layer, forming the middle layer.
Need: **Thick clumps of tall vegetation** in which to safely hide nests, forage, and feed young.

**How you can help**

- Plant clumps of tall-growing shrubs and low-growing trees that are native to your region, such as willow and palo verde.
- Add fruit-bearing plants, like elderberry, to your planting mix.

Need: **Safe travel routes** from the midstory to the understory and canopy layers, or *habitat structure*.

**How you can help**

- Allow the midstory to connect with other forest layers. Climbing plants that are native to your region can enhance habitat structure.
**Mourning Dove**  
*(Zenaida macroura)*

**Identification:** 12" Pinkish brown overall. Black spots on wings and single spot on each cheek. Long pointed tail tipped white.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Seeds.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Avoid mowing, clearing brush, and pruning trees in the breeding season (February - August).
Anna's Hummingbird
(Calypte anna)

**Identification:** 4” Upperparts green, underparts grayish. *Male* (shown): Iridescent rose-pink crown and throat. *Female:* Throat with lines of spots or small patch of pink feathers.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout much of California, although largely absent from eastern portions.

**Diet:** Nectar, insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant native flowering plants like monkeyflower and penstemon.
Black-chinned Hummingbird

(*Archilochus alexandri*)

**Identification:** 4” Upperparts green, underparts whitish. *Male* (shown): Throat blackish, lower throat blue-violet. *Female:* Throat whitish.

**Range:** *Breeder* in the Central Valley and surrounding foothills and locales in southern CA.

**Diet:** Nectar, insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant native flowering plants like monkeyflower and penstemon.
Pacific-slope Flycatcher
*(Empidonax difficilis)*

**Identification:** 6" Two pale wing bars, tear drop-shaped pale eyering. Upperparts olive, underparts pale yellowish. Often flicks tail.

**Range:** Breeder along the coast and in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant dense clumps of trees using tanoak and black oak. Retain stumps and snags.
Willow Flycatcher
(Empidonax traillii)

**Identification:** 6" Upperparts brownish, underparts pale with gray chest. Yellow wash to belly. Faint eyering, tan wingbars. Often flicks tail.

**Range:** *Breeder* primarily in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Formerly much more widespread.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant dense clumps of shrubs and trees. Use native vegetation such as willows and wild rose.
Western Wood-Pewee
(*Contopus sordidulus*)

**Identification:** 6" Grayish overall with paler throat and belly, pale wingbars. Does not flick tail. Perches prominently.

**Range:** *Breeder* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Connect patches of creekside vegetation. Plant native trees such as cottonwoods, willows, and oaks. Maintain sparse pines where appropriate.
Vermillion Flycatcher
(*Pyrocephalus rubinus*)

**Identification:** 6" *Male* (shown): Dark mask. Head and underparts bright red. Upperparts dark. *Female:* Upperparts brown, underparts white with faint streaks on chest, pink belly.

**Range:** *Breeder* along Lower Colorado River.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Avoid clearing brush during the breeding season (February – August).
Western Scrub-Jay  
\textit{(Aphelocoma coerulescens)}

**Identification:** 12" Head and upperparts blue with black mask bordered above by white. Underparts grayish.

**Range:** \textit{Resident} throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, acorns, other seeds, berries.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Avoid clearing brush and pruning trees during the breeding season (February – August).
Bushtit
(Psaltriparus minimus)


Range: Resident throughout California.

Diet: Insects.

Habitat Improvement Tip: Wherever possible, widen creekside corridors by planting clumps of shrubs and trees. Maintain trees that stand above the other layers of vegetation.
American Robin
(Turdus migratorius)

**Identification:** 10" Head and upperparts dark gray, head often blacker. Underparts rusty. Yellow bill, white around the eye.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, berries, earthworms.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Create feeding habitat by planting fruit-bearing plants such as California blackberry.
Northern Mockingbird

(Mimus polyglottos)

**Identification:** 10" Gray overall, paler below. Two white wingbars and white wing patches in flight. Long black tail edged white.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, berries.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Avoid clearing brush and pruning trees in the breeding season (February – August).
Phainopepla
*(Phainopepla nitens)*

**Identification:** 8" Red eyes, spiky crest, white wing patches in flight. *Male* (shown): Glossy black. *Female*: Gray overall.

**Range:** *Resident* in the Mojave, Colorado, and Sonoran deserts and occurs in the Sierra Nevada foothills and coastal southern California.

**Diet:** Mistletoe berries, other berries, insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Maintain shrubs and trees that produce small berries.
Yellow Warbler  
*(Dendroica petechia)*

**Identification:** 5” Yellow overall with greenish yellow wings and tail. *Male* (shown): Reddish streaks on chest. *Female:* Duller yellow, little to no streaking on chest.

**Range:** *Breeder* locally in California. Formerly much more widespread.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant and maintain a diverse mix of native shrubs and trees.
Black-headed Grosbeak
(Pheucticus melanocephalus)

**Identification:** 8" Male (shown): Orange-brown with black head. Wings black and white. Female: Upperparts brown, underparts streaked. Tan eyebrow.

**Range:** Breeder throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds, berries.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant dense clumps of shrubs and trees. Use native vegetation such as willows and oaks.
Lesser Goldfinch

(*Carduelis psaltria*)

**Identification:** 5" Upperparts greenish and underparts yellowish. Wings black with white patches. *Male* (shown): Crown black.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Seeds, insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant dense clumps of shrubs and trees. Use native vegetation such as willows, oaks, and California wild rose.
House Finch
(Carpodacus mexicanus)


**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Seeds, berries.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Maintain native upland habitat adjacent to creeks.
III. Canopy Nesters

Canopy nesters build their nests on branches near or at the tree top - the penthouse suites. The canopy layer is comprised of tall trees that provide shade for the midstory and understory layers. It may take more than five years at newly restored creeks before trees reach an appropriate height to allow canopy nesters to move in.

So, what do birds need from the canopy and how can you help enhance this essential vegetation layer along your creeks?

Canopy = the uppermost layer in a forest, formed by the crowns of trees.
**Need: Thick clumps of tall trees** in which to safely hide nests, forage, and feed young.

**How you can help**

- Plant clumps of trees that are native to your region like cottonwoods, alders, and aspen.
- When necessary, conduct tree work (e.g., tree felling or pruning) in months when birds are not breeding in your region.

**Need: Safe travel routes** from the canopy to the forest floor, or *habitat structure*.

**How you can help**

- Allow the canopy to connect with other forest layers. Climbing plants that are native to your region can enhance habitat structure.
- Retain trees that stand above the other layers of vegetation.
Osprey
(Pandion haliaetus)

**Identification:** 23" Dark brown face stripe. Head and underparts white. Upperparts dark brown. *In Flight:* Long wings with bend at wrist. Distinct underwing pattern with black wrist patches.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Fish.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Retain large, old trees and snags adjacent to creeks and ponds.
Red-shouldered Hawk
(Buteo lineatus)

**Identification:** 19" Upperwings checkered black and white. Head and upperparts gray, underparts rusty. *In Flight:* Pale crescent near wingtip. Black and white bands on tail.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Small mammals, amphibians, reptiles.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Connect patches of creekside vegetation by planting native trees.
Swainson's Hawk

*(Buteo swainsoni)*

**Identification:** 21" Throat and belly white. Head, upperparts, and chest dark brown. *In Flight:* Long, pointed wings. Underwings are brown and white.

**Range:** *Breeder* in the Central Valley and locally elsewhere in the state.

**Diet:** Small mammals, reptiles, large insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Maintain native upland habitat adjacent to creeks which includes
Great Horned Owl  
(Bubo virginianus)

**Identification:** 22" Large, gray-brown owl with thick ear tufts (the "horns"). Yellow eyes, white throat.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Maintain native upland habitat adjacent to creeks which includes large trees.
Western Kingbird  
(*Tyrannus verticalis*)

**Identification:** 9" Belly yellow, tail black with white outer edges. Head gray with darker mask, upperparts gray. Chest pale gray, throat white.

**Range:** *Breeder* throughout California, although largely absent from the coast.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Maintain snags for perching, even if not appropriate for cavity use.
Steller's Jay
*(Cyanocitta stelleri)*

**Identification:** 12" Dark bluish overall with dark slaty head and back. Pointed crest.

**Range:** *Resident* primarily in montane and coastal areas throughout California, although absent from southern coastal California.

**Diet:** Acorns, other seeds, berries, insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Avoid brush clearing and tree pruning during the breeding season (February – August).
American Crow

*(Corvus brachyrhynchos)*

**Identification:** 18” All black with squared tail. Bill stout and black.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, small birds and mammals, seeds, fruits, carrion.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Do not supplement the diet of avian nest predators, such as crows. Whenever possible, keep food sources such as animal feed and composts covered to prevent their access.
Warbling Vireo
(Vireo gilvus)

Identification: 6" Plain gray bird. White eyebrow, whitish underparts sometimes with yellowish tinge.

Range: Breeder primarily in montane and coastal areas throughout California.

Diet: Insects.

Habitat Improvement Tip: Wherever possible, widen creekside corridors with clumped native vegetation, such as willows and alders.
Bullock's Oriole
(Icterus bullockii)

Identification: 9" Male (shown): Face and underparts orange with black eyeline and throat. Crown and back black, wings black and white. Female: Upperparts olive-gray, underparts yellow and gray. Two white wing bars.

Range: Breeder throughout California.

Diet: Insects, berries, nectar.

Habitat Improvement Tip: Maintain native upland habitat adjacent to water.
IV. Cavity Nesters

A surprisingly wide variety of birds nest inside holes in trees. Many cavity nesters do not possess the tool - a long, sharp bill - needed for making holes in trees. Thus, woodpeckers - who are also cavity nesters - play a critical role in riparian habitat. They help to excavate cavities and create nest sites in areas where natural cavities might be absent.

So, how can you help enhance your creeks for cavity-nesting birds?

Cavity = a hollow or hole in a tree.
Cavity Nesters

Need: Places in which to safely hide nests, forage, and feed young.

How you can help

• Maintain old trees and snags along your creek and adjacent property.

• Keep dead branches where they do not pose a threat to any man-made structures on your property.

• Assure regeneration of tree species for future generations of cavity nesters.

• Consider adding and maintaining nest boxes in areas where natural cavities are absent, such as restored habitat. To find out more information about the proper maintenance of nest boxes, contact your local Audubon chapter or visit: http://www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse.
Wood Duck
(Aix sponsa)

Identification: 19" Male (shown): Head and crest dark green with white stripes. Red eyes and bill, white throat extending to cheek. Upperparts blackish, purple chest. Female: Brown overall with thick white, teardrop-shaped eyering.

Range: Resident throughout California.

Diet: Acorns, other seeds, invertebrates.

Habitat Improvement Tip: Retain large trees and snags with cavities near creeks and ponds.
Gila Woodpecker
(Melanerpes uropygialis)

Identification: 9" Head and underparts tan, upperparts barred black and white. Male (shown): Red crown patch.

Range: Resident along the Lower Colorado River.

Diet: Insects, cactus fruit, flowers.

Habitat Improvement Tip: Connect patches of creekside vegetation using native trees.
Northern Flicker  
(*Colaptes auratus*)


**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Ants and other insects, fruits, berries.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Retain large trees and snags with cavities near creeks and ponds.
Hairy Woodpecker
(Picoides villosus)

**Identification:** 9" Black and white with white back stripe. Relatively long, heavy bill. No black bars on tail. *Male* (shown): Red on back of crown.

**Range:** *Resident* primarily in montane and coastal areas throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Connect patches of creekside vegetation by planting native trees.
Downy Woodpecker
(Picoides pubescens)


Range: Resident throughout California.

Diet: Insects.

Habitat Improvement Tip: Retain large trees and snags with cavities near creeks and ponds.
Nuttall's Woodpecker
(Picoides nuttallii)

**Identification:** 8” Black and white with barred upperparts. Spotted belly. *Male:* Red on back of crown.

**Range:** *Resident* west of the deserts and in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Retain large trees and snags with cavities near creeks and ponds.
Ash-throated Flycatcher
(Myiarchus cinerascens)

**Identification:** 9" Bushy head. Head and upperparts gray-brown. Face gray with black bill. Throat and chest pale gray. Belly pale yellow. Rusty wings and tail in flight.

**Range:** Breeder throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, cactus fruit.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Retain large trees and snags with cavities near creeks and ponds.
Identification: 6" Upperparts glossy greenish blue. Throat and underparts white. Some females have brown upperparts.

Range: Breeder throughout California.

Diet: Insects.

Habitat Improvement Tip: Retain large trees and snags with cavities in open grassy areas or near creeks and ponds.
Violet-green Swallow

(Tachycineta thalassina)

**Identification:** 5" Crown and upperparts dark green, sometimes with purple gloss. *Male* (shown): Face, throat, and underparts white. Female similar, but face duller patterned.

**Range:** *Breeder* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Retain large trees and snags with cavities near creeks and ponds.
Chestnut-backed Chickadee
(Parus rufescens)

**Identification:** 5" Dark cap and throat. White cheek patch. Back chestnut, wings and tail gray-brown.

**Range:** Resident along the coast and locally in the Cascades and Sierra Nevada mountains.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds, berries.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Retain large trees and snags with cavities in riparian forests.
White-breasted Nuthatch

*(Sitta carolinensis)*

**Identification:** 6" Upperparts gray with black-ish cap. Face and underparts white, sides rusty. Climbs tree trunks and branches.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects, seeds.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Retain large trees and snags with cavities, especially pine snags. Maintain native upland habitat adjacent to water.
Bewick's Wren  
*(Thryomanes bewickii)*

**Identification:** 5" White eyebrow. Head and upperparts gray-brown with black barring on wings and tail. Underparts whitish. Often flips long tail from side to side.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Plant clumps of native shrubs and trees. Create potential nest sites by retaining fallen logs and exposed roots.
House Wren

(*Troglodytes aedon*)

**Identification:** 5" Brownish overall, paler below. Pale eyering, barred wings and tail.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout California.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Retain large trees and snags with cavities near creeks and ponds. Maintain native upland habitat adjacent to water.
Western Bluebird
(Sialia mexicana)


**Range:** *Resident* throughout much of California, although largely absent from the deserts.

**Diet:** Insects, berries.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Retain large trees and snags with cavities near creeks and ponds.
V. Non-traditional Nesters

Adaptable and innovative, many of us encounter non-traditional nesters every day during the spring and summer. Whether under eaves or bridges or on barn rafters, some birds are able to take full advantage of ‘human habitat.’

So, how can you help enhance your creeks for non-traditional nesters?

Need: Places in which to safely hide nests, forage, and feed young.

How you can help

• If you must prevent nesting in inappropriate spots (e.g., swallows), deter birds before nesting begins. *Note: it is illegal to destroy active nests.*

• Set aside ‘safe-zones’ for nesting, including barns and underneath bridges, where disturbance during the breeding season is minimized.
Identification: 13" Long, pointed bill and bushy head. Upperparts blue-gray with white collar. Underparts white with blue-gray band across chest. Female: (shown) Also has rusty band across chest.

Range: Resident throughout California.

Diet: Small fish.

Habitat Improvement Tip: Protect areas with streambank burrows.
Black Phoebe
(Sayornis nigricans)

**Identification:** 7" Black overall with white belly. Often dips tail while perched.

**Range:** *Resident* west of the deserts and Sierra Nevada Mountains.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Protect potential nest structures adjacent to your creek such as pump houses and underneath bridges.
Bank Swallow

(*Riparia riparia*)

**Identification:** 5" Upperparts brown, underparts white with brown chest band.

**Range:** *Breeder* locally in northern California. Formerly much more widespread.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Protect areas with streambank burrows.
Barn Swallow

(Hirundo rustica)

**Identification:** 7” Deeply forked tail. Head and upperparts glossy blue-black. Forehead and throat chestnut. Underparts buffy.

**Range:** *Breeder* throughout much of California, although largely absent from the deserts.

**Diet:** Insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Protect potential nest structures adjacent to your creek such as barns and underneath bridges.
Brown-headed Cowbird
(Molothrus ater)

**Identification:** 8” *Male:* (shown) Glossy black with brown head. *Female:* Pale gray-brown overall, throat and underparts lighter.

**Range:** *Resident* throughout the state.

**Diet:** Seeds and insects.

**Habitat Improvement Tip:** Cowbirds parasitize other birds' nests, which can cause population declines in some bird species. Connect patches of creekside vegetation to discourage them.
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