

# Gray Lodge Wildlife Area Wildlife Viewing

With a backdrop of the world's smallest mountain range, the Sutter Buttes, Gray Lodge Wildlife Area is the perfect site for viewing and photographing nature. The viewable species change through the seasons and often include shorebirds, waterfowl, songbirds, and mammals.

## The skies are alive!

Although wildlife is abundant throughout the year, Gray Lodge is famed for the more than a million waterfowl that pass through during the fall and winter months. They fill the sanctuary with lively chatter and incredible sights. The marsh offers seasonal resting places for waterfowl from as far away as Wrangle Island, near Russia, and the Pacific Ocean. They feed on invertebrates and plants such as swamp timothy, spike bulrush, pondweed and watergrass.

In addition to waterfowl, birds such as hawks, eagles, kites, and owls are also present. Mammals such as deer, coyote, rabbits, and gray fox may also be seen here. If you don't see any, follow the clues they leave behind: tracks, scat, teeth marks on a tree, scrapings in the dust. Learn to read the "who ate what" and "who was here" stories evident on the ground.

## Seasonal Viewing

The best waterfowl viewing tends to be November through early February, on crisp, clear days. Binoculars and a field guide are useful, but not essential. Migrating ducks may be viewed as early as August. The vocal snow geese begin their arrival in October, which marks the beginning of our peak visitation season. By November, as many as a million ducks and a hundred-thousand geese can be found resting in our sanctuary. By this time, the waterfowl have greatly depleted the available food in the Gray Lodge sanctuary, causing them to leave this daytime resting ground in search of food. Occurring in the afternoons when the geese are concentrated, this "night-flight" is another incredible experience. In the spring, listen for the calls of gulls and squadrons of white pelicans, which give the wildlife area a seaside appeal.

For those that like to experience the sights and sounds of nature, a designated wildlife viewing area is open year-round, and includes a driving route and nature trails. October through February, the rest of the wildlife area is closed seasonally to non-hunting activities (from two weeks before waterfowl season to one week after). However, late February through early October, over 150 miles of maintenance roadways become accessible on foot or by bicycle.

## Attractions

- **Auto Loop:** For those who like to remain in their cars, a 3-mile auto-loop winds through the heart of the designated viewing area. To limit wildlife disturbance, **all visitors must**

**remain in their vehicles** on this route during our peak visitation season, October through February.

- **Wildlife Museum:** This wildlife exhibit room contains many taxidermy species of birds and a few mammals found on the Gray Lodge Wildlife Area.
- **Wildlife Observation Hides:** Gaze through windows to see our Central Valley wildlife in a minimal disturbance setting. Overlooking two of our seasonal ponds, these buildings can provide great opportunities for viewing and photographing wildlife. Available without reservation, these are accessed from Lots #14 or #18 along the graveled, Flyway Loop Trail. Many visitors find this a comfortable and rewarding experience.
- **Trails:** The 0.6-mile Wetland Discovery trail will take you along transition zones of ponds, grassy fields and wooded riparian areas. Complete with a booklet, this paved trail leads you to an elevated wildlife viewing platform, sloped for the mobility impaired, which overlooks a seasonal pond. Although it is less than a mile round-trip, most visitors find this relaxing trail takes over an hour to complete. Another option is our 2-mile, graveled Flyway Loop Trail, which meanders by the edges of seasonal and permanent ponds. All peak season walking routes originate out of parking lots #14 or #18.
- **Guided Walks (seasonal October thru January):** Guided public walks are available Saturdays and Sundays at 12:30 pm, unless raining, through the peak viewing season. Reservations are requested for groups over 20 persons. Tours take about 1-1/2 hours.
- **Tours (September – April):** A wildlife naturalist will lead your group, school, or organization through the diverse wetlands of the Gray Lodge Wildlife Area. General information includes wildlife identification, behavior patterns, conservation efforts and more. Your experience can be catered to include requested information, along a half-mile, walking route. Tours are available throughout the week. Minimum group size required. Dates fill quickly. For more information, call the Naturalist Office at (530) 846-7505 or email [Lori.Dieter@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Lori.Dieter@wildlife.ca.gov) .

## Photography

Many photographic opportunities are available from the walking paths and auto routes. The hides create a unique opportunity to set up equipment out of the weather, capturing images of wildlife in their wintering habitat through opening windows.