

YOU MAY ASK, why am I putting the following on my website? If I am a professional birding guide, why "spill the beans" and give away my hard-earned, accumulated years of knowledge about the area? Well...

1. The majority of the information is available in the ABA guide, which you may already have or will likely purchase anyway. But if you don't have it yet, or want a bit more detail, I hope this helps!
2. If you are a serious birder (or a beginner, for that matter) you realize that simply knowing a place, and even time range, where a bird can occur is entirely different from actually locating and getting good looks at it. I know the vocalizations, habits, and seasonal movements, as well as annual occurrences, of many or most of the species you may wish to see. You won't waste time chasing unfamiliar sounds or flashes, only to discover they are common species you have already seen several times.
3. Many of the birds you may want me to help you find are ones that may occur OUTSIDE the area covered in my chapter, or at other sites within the area. I am hoping that you will find the following helpful enough that you will contact me, even if you plan to go it alone in the region covered.

So then, the following is the more complete and detailed version of the chapter I wrote for the updated *2006 ABA Guide to Birding in Southern California*.

PALOS VERDES PENINSULA AND SURROUNDING AREA

by Martin Byhower

The Palos Verdes Peninsula and surroundings are famous for their scenic coastline and beautiful homes. As birders discover it, it becomes known for its unique bird assemblage as well. Local birders know that "The Hill" and the surrounding coastal lowlands are species-rich and vastly under-birded secrets in Los Angeles County. At one time or another virtually anything can—and eventually does—show up.

In prehistory the Peninsula was once one of Southern California's offshore Channel Islands, maintaining a closer biological affinity with them than with other nearby mountain ranges. The Peninsula is now separated from the Santa Monica and San Gabriel Mountains, not by water, but by the highly urbanized Los Angeles basin. The island of Palos Verdes first emerged between 1 and 2 million years ago. It joined the mainland relatively recently, at the end of the last ice age, between 10 and 20 thousand years ago, as the Los Angeles basin filled with debris from the erosion of the nearby Transverse Ranges.

Whether or not portions were previously connected to the mainland, organisms that colonized or were stranded on the island were isolated from the mainland long enough for new species and subspecies to diverge. Some species that ordinarily might be expected in this habitat, such as Wrentit, Oak Titmouse, and California Thrasher, seem

unwilling to cross the Los Angeles basin in order to inhabit the area (can you blame them?)

Isolation has its benefits, as well. Perhaps the non-migratory *sedentarius* race of Allen's Hummingbird evolved on the island of Palos Verdes; it continues its dispersal to surrounding areas even today. In any case, the Palos Verdes Peninsula may be the only area where the Allen's is as common a resident as Anna's Hummingbird, while migrant Rufous and Black-chinned Hummingbirds are relatively scarce. In winter, check the abundant flowering *Eucalyptus* and *Melaleucas* (bottle-brush) planted throughout the area. Year round, Allen's can be found fairly easily in the local canyons and parks and in residential neighborhoods at any nectar-rich flowers or sugar-water feeders.

The Palos Verdes area also hosts the resident, rather dull (but endearing) Channel Island *sordida* subspecies of Orange-crowned Warbler. Based upon subtle variations in plumage and call or song, some meticulous observers believe that we probably also have our "own" versions of Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Spotted Towhee, and possibly others as well. But it is the excellent assortment of fall migrants and vagrants as well as some excellent offshore pelagic scoping that really draws the binocular-toting crowds. Some interesting winter vagrants, spring migrants, shorebirds, and the presence of "specialties" like the CA Gnatcatcher and various western endemics round things out to make the area a worthy destination any time of year.

The Palos Verdes Peninsula also hosts an eclectic group of stable breeding populations of exotics. Spotted Doves have declined drastically, but Peafowl, Mitred Parakeets, and Yellow-chevroned Parakeets are locally common. Which of the preceding you deem "countable" depends upon whose rules you decide to play by.

Before birding the area, check the map in this guide and also pick up a good local map such as the AAA "Southern Area" Los Angeles map. Note especially that the Peninsula uplands are broadly surrounded by a "square" perimeter road that changes name successively from Palos Verdes Drive West to PV Dr. South, PV Dr. East, or PV Dr. North as you circle the area counterclockwise.

An excellent starting point for observing a representative sample of Southern California species as well as some regionally scarce specialties is **Ken Malloy/Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP)**. Through the years over 300 species have been documented here—a very large number for such a small area! This, Banning Park and Deforest Park are probably the three best spots to visit during migration, but KMHRP is an excellent place to bird year-round. One can easily spend an entire day birding here. Much of the habitat has been degraded, but the birding is still good to excellent. Watching for new, rare, and long-absent species to drop in is a big part of the fun!

Start at the intersection of Pacific Coast Highway (Highway 1) and the Harbor Freeway (Interstate 110). Go northwest on Pacific Coast Highway, turning left (south) at the traffic light onto Vermont Avenue (0.5). Park where the lot curves around to the right, paralleling Pacific Coast Highway (PCH).

A walk eastward along the remaining riparian forest (the "north-end willows" as locals call them) can turn up excellent vagrants during late fall migration into the winter, and sometimes in late spring, as well. Earlier in the morning is best here. There are tentative

plans to eventually fence this area and restrict hours, but even if that happens most species will be visible from outside the fence. Try to locate the warbler/Bushtit flock(s) and then seek out the unusual members. Residents in the willows here include Allen's Hummingbird, Downy Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, American Robin, American Goldfinch, the Channel Island (*sordida*) race of Orange-crowned Warbler, California Towhee, and other species. Townsend's, Yellow-rumped, and Black-throated Gray Warblers can be common here in mixed winter flocks. Many years Winter Wren, Black and White Warbler, and other vagrants and out-of-range species can be found wintering here. A few pairs of Yellow Warblers and Black-Chinned Hummers represent the only remaining breeding populations of these species on the Peninsula (summer). Red-shouldered and Cooper's Hawks, Bullock's Oriole, and maybe a few Swainson's Thrushes still nest in the area in season. Venture deep enough and you might find Reggie, the Park's legendary alligator (but more likely, you'd see invasive snapping and red-eared slider turtles and *Natrix* water snakes.) End your eastward stroll when you reach the point where the "Wilmington Drain" crosses under PCH. Follow the edge of the water south (watch your step) into an elevated clearing. Wilson's Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, Bell's Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat and other species have all attempted to nest here: with cowbird control and a bit of encouragement, they may ultimately succeed. One winter a Groove-billed Ani stopped in north of here.

To continue, walk back to your car and then walk or drive parallel to **Machado Lake**, southward along Vermont Avenue. (You can choose to walk the length of the lake or leapfrog to the succeeding parking lots along the west shore.) There are always a few grebes, ducks, gulls, and shorebirds visible from this area southward to the dam/spillway, and the numbers increase significantly in winter. This can be a good area to pick up Thayer's Gull (usually immature) in the gull flock, especially after mid-November. Be sure to scan the groups of feral geese and ducks for surprisingly easy-to-miss legitimate individuals like Brant, Ross's Goose, Wood Duck, and the like. In late May, check this area at dusk for Black Swift and other unusual migrants. Always check over the lake for White-throated Swift (year round) and Vaux's swift (migration), as well as all western swallow species in migration (some winter here as well.)

Search the tules on your side of the lake as well as on the opposite shore for Sora, Common Moorhen, Marsh Wren (only spot in the region for this species), Song Sparrow, Red-winged and Tricolored Blackbirds, and other marsh birds. Tricoloreds often segregate by sex and/or age, and are declining locally, but there are still at least a few around in winter. Unfortunately, Great-tailed Grackles have moved in for good (or bad) threatening many of the regionally declining nesting wetland species. (In recent winters, a much more reliable place to look for Tricolored Blackbirds is adjacent to the parking lots on the north, east and south sides of Wilson Park, east of the intersection of Sepulveda and Crenshaw in nearby Torrance.)

In late spring and summer the south end of Machado Lake has been one of the best locations in Los Angeles County to look for Least Bitterns. Look for them in the tules along the east shore or flying across the lake (watch for American Bitterns in winter). Better yet, park in the lot closest to Anaheim Street and Vermont Avenue and walk east along the concrete bike path to stop mid-lake along the spillway. Standing along the spillway in the morning or at dusk in June and July affords the best opportunity to spot

Least Bittern, as well as Least Terns teaching their young to fish for the mosquito fish stocked in the lake. During winter and migration this is also an excellent place to spot a variety of herons (including Black-crowned Night Heron), egrets, ducks (especially Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall, and Northern Shoveler), and other water birds on the lake; sparrows and warblers frequent the weedy bushes below the dam.

Continue across the dam and stop at the end. The willow forest on the left can be excellent for warblers and other migrants. Depending upon the season, scan the field to your right for White-Tailed Kite, Loggerhead Shrike (declining locally), Cassin's, Western and (in fall) Tropical Kingbirds, and sparrows. Ahead of you, near the chain link fence at the corner of the golf driving range, is an area locals call the "sparrow corner." Watch here and in the adjacent restoration area to your left and below you for vagrant sparrows (winter and migration) and migrant Lazuli Buntings among the common White-crowns, Lincoln's, and Savannahs. Don't get fooled by the exotic Nutmeg Manikins or Orange Bishops (the female of which might be mistaken for a Grasshopper Sparrow). Continue around the restoration area, checking ponds there for Cinnamon and Green-winged Teal and others. When you come to the end of the bike path, check the Eucalyptus trees for sapsuckers; these and a few red willows in the park commonly host Red-breasted, and Yellow-bellied and Red-naped Sapsuckers have also been seen here recently. Hooded and Bullock's Orioles are also common spring and summer here. If you want to proceed at this point, you can follow the trail next to the lake around to the left until it ends. *Do not walk up onto the adjacent golf course.*

A less stressful option at this point is to go back the way you came and head south from the west side of the spillway (if water is pooled, check here for ducks and shorebirds), then east around the bend, entering an area of dirt trails bordering the seasonally-inundated lower wetlands. Trails then loop through Camp Machado, an occasionally productive area composed mostly of non-native trees and shrubs. Eventually you will come to the seasonally inundated (and soon to become permanent) "lower wetlands" which can be very productive for birds mentioned earlier, particularly during times when the Park/lake margin is crowded with people.

Nearby **Banning Park** can be excellent for spring or fall migrants and ranks among the best fall vagrant havens in California. Many Southern California birders have seen their life eastern vireos, warblers, tanagers, and more here. It is also a good place to hone your skills in identifying an assortment of *Empidonax* flycatchers.

To reach Banning Park from KMHRP, drive east on Pacific Coast Highway from the corner of Vermont Avenue to Eubank Street (2.0), turn right, then right again on Robidoux, and execute a quick right into the park. Bird the entire park (less than 0.25 square mile), which during migration can be dead one day and hopping with birds the next. If you arrive early, after the sprinklers have shut off and before joggers and walkers crowd the park, the ponds and puddles along the pathways throughout the park will be hopping with bathing birds. If you have a chance, check out this park on several successive days because the lineup of avian players can change daily.

The flowering Eucalyptus, ash, and Siberian elm trees along the channel on the west perimeter are often good, as are the carob trees on the east perimeter. A small knoll at the north-central end of the park is great for watching a colorful array of warblers, tanagers,

orioles, grosbeaks, buntings and more moving in and out of the adjacent silk oaks (*Grevillea*) and live oaks. As this text is being written in April 2006, a wintering Thick-billed Kingbird (rare vagrant) is still present. Another good area is near the fruiting *Ficus* trees on the Pacific Coast Highway side (west of the rose garden), which are often loaded with Western Tanagers and Black-headed Grosbeaks during migration; For several years, a Yellow-green Vireo showed up annually here. Watch here for Summer Tanager and Baltimore Oriole (both regular vagrants), and sapsuckers.

If you're visiting during shorebird migration (which begins in earnest in mid-to-late July) and wish to catch an excellent peep show, head from Banning Park over to the nearby **Los Angeles River**. Ongoing restoration of virtually the entire LA River continues, but believe it or not, the concrete lined channels, from the Rosecrans Ave. crossing in Paramount to Willow Street in Long Beach, apparently simulate the shallow mud flats favored by many migrant shorebirds; since this surrogate wetland is the "only game in town," this stretch can be fantastically rich. The best birding locations here vary from year to year according to water flow, silt accumulation, and the resulting bottom-scraping activities of the LA Dept. of Public Works. If the following sites aren't productive, check at or near any of the other crossings/access points along this stretch. If you plan to walk long stretches, bring sunscreen, water, and a cell phone (to get other birders down to confirm that Red-necked Stint you discovered) in addition to your scope.

From Banning Park, continue east another 2 miles on Pacific Coast Highway to the Long Beach (710) Freeway and drive north about 4 miles to Del Amo Street. Take the east exit across the river to the first right (Oregon Avenue) and park in the residential area across from the religious school (read the parking signs to avoid street-sweeper-day violations).

Walk back (west) along the chain-link fence, down the hill, and then up to the pathway along the east edge of the levee. The birding is best from here southward for about one-half mile to where Compton Creek enters into the channel, but some years heading further north or south will turn up interesting congregations of shorebirds. Morning is best from this (the east) side, since you will be looking toward the west.

Among the hundreds to thousands of Western and Least Sandpipers that begin to arrive in July, try to pick out the much rarer Semipalmated, Baird's, and Pectoral Sandpipers, all of which regularly occur here (late August and September) in small numbers. Solitary Sandpiper shows up annually, and one or more Ruff/Reeve occurs virtually annually during late migration, sometimes wintering here. Semipalmated Plovers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers (the former dominate in August, the latter in September), Red-necked and Wilson's Phalaropes, and other waders are regular here. Periodically an Osprey may fly over or a marauding Peregrine Falcon may swoop down to snack on a peep.

From the Del Amo crossing, you are quite close to an excellent migrant/vagrant trap that is little known and only recently frequented by birders: **Deforest Park**, a tiny strip of mixed trees and shrubs along a creek that parallels the LA River. It is tricky to find but worth the effort, especially during migration. Take the 710 Freeway 1 mile north of Del Amo to Long Beach Blvd. and take the eastbound exit. Cross the river and go left at the Mobil station (55th St.). Take the first left (Chestnut Ave.) to Deforest Ave. You are now near the south entrance to the park. Walk the trails, checking the willows, coral trees

(when blooming), Eucalyptus, and others. Some days, this spot can be the best in the region for a wide variety of migrants.

Uncommon species like Franklin's or Glaucous Gulls (see seasonal status in the bar-graphs) can also show up along the Del Amo and other nearby stretches of the Los Angeles River, particularly at another good spot south of here: the **Willow Street crossing**. Willow Street should be checked year round, because something interesting is nearly always present if you look hard enough. Retrace your drive from the Del Amo river crossing back about 3 miles south to the first exit north of Pacific Coast Highway, and take the Willow Street East off-ramp. Cross the river, turning right onto the first street, Golden Avenue. Immediately turn right onto 25th Street, parking a block away at its intersection with DeForest. Walk up the embankment and bird along the river for about 100 yards southward. Depending on the season, and whether or not the county crews have scraped the channel bottom recently, you can see a good-sized flock of Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal and other ducks, American Avocets and Black-necked Stilts (both of which may nest here in June and July), a good assortment of egrets, herons, gulls, terns, plovers, an occasional White-faced Ibis, and many of the species seen at the previous site. A Little Stint caused a big stir here in late August 2002. Watch the weedy areas along the banks here and at Del Amo for Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, and maybe even a Bobolink in fall.

KMHRP is central to many of the other good birding spots in the area. If, instead of chasing vagrants or shorebirds, you choose to look for species of the coastal sage scrub and riparian canyon communities, **George F Canyon** is one of several great places to visit. You will see many of the same birds that occur at the **South Coast Botanic Garden**, but more of them, in a more natural habitat, and without paying a fee. However, the **South Coast Botanic Garden** (fee) is a good place to pick up some migrants in fall and spring, and a few odd vagrants in late fall and winter. There are regularly scheduled bird walks on the first Sunday and third Wednesday of the month at 8 AM. However, the plants and habitat are limited due in part to problems related to the botanic garden's location on a shifting, out-gassing landfill. If the gift shop is open, you can pick up the checklist of the large number of birds that have visited in the past, but don't expect to see more than 10 to 20 percent of the species on the list at any one time. To get to the South Coast Botanic Garden from the 5-way intersection (Five Points) at the southwest corner of Harbor Park, where Anaheim Street, Gaffey, Vermont, and Palos Verdes Drive North all come together, head west (uphill) on Palos Verdes Drive North to Crenshaw Boulevard (3.5), then go right to the South Coast Botanic Garden entrance on the right (0.3).

George F Canyon is closer to Harbor Park. From the Five Points Intersection (see above) take Palos Verdes Drive North west to its intersection with Palos Verdes Drive East (1.8). Go left (south) on Palos Verdes Drive East and immediately park on the right (on the southwestern corner of the intersection) at the delightful George F Canyon Nature Preserve Visitors Center (restrooms, bookstore; open weekends only) or drive to the main trailhead of Lower George F Canyon (0.1). Pick up a trail guide at the kiosk on the trailhead and head up this lovely riparian canyon, home of the only significant perennial stream on the Peninsula.

Because of the water and the fact that the canyon faces northward, the local habitat is uncharacteristically green and lush for this dry region. Hike the entire trail (0.75 mile) for an excellent introduction to the local botany and geology as well as the birds. During migration, this is a good area for Pacific-slope and Ash-throated Flycatchers, Warbling Vireo, most of the western warblers, and Black-headed Grosbeak. Phainopepla, Swainson's Thrush, and some of the previously mentioned migrants breed in this canyon and the upstream watershed. Resident and/or wintering species here include most of those typical of coastal Southern California, as well as Hutton's Vireo which is rare on the PV Peninsula. At the top of the trail watch for White-throated Swift and swallows as well as for soaring hawks.

[From the Lower George F trailhead, take Palos Verdes Drive East south to Palos Verdes Drive South (6.2); this road parallels the cliffs on the south part of the peninsula, giving you access to the coast at various places. You can choose to go right to Forrestal Canyon and the Ocean Trails area, or to go left (east) to visit Royal Palms State Beach/White Point, and then either head north up Western Avenue to check some green spots in San Pedro (including Averill and Peck Parks) or continue east to Point Fermin Park and Cabrillo Beach.

To bird the **Forrestal Canyon Preserve**, turn right onto Palos Verdes Drive South, drive 0.7 mile to Forrestal Drive, and turn right, parking at the gate at the end of the road. This area has been mined and was slated for development, but due to the extraordinary efforts of the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy and some wise decision-making by the city of Rancho Palos Verdes, this unique gem has been preserved in perpetuity. The best time to visit here is in spring, in the early morning.

A very short distance past the gate, look for the information sign on the right. There is a trail marker here. Be sure to take the left "Quarry Bowl Trail" fork up the steep hill. In spring you may encounter the relatively docile Pacific Rattlesnake, so long pants, boots, and caution are advised. As soon as you start up the path, start looking and listening for birds. A year-round natural spring is about one-quarter mile up the road, but the walk to the closest approach to the (inaccessible) spring is the birding highlight here. The spring is located at the end of a crater-like depression, which locals call the Quarry Bowl. The cliffs, bottom of the bowl, and the willows and other vegetation surrounding the spring are all good areas for California and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (see discussion following), and for Allen's Hummingbird, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, and the usual resident/wintering suite of chaparral birds. This area used to be good for Rock and Cactus Wrens, and if you are lucky you may still encounter them here. The last covey(s) of California Quail on the peninsula (which, granted, may consist entirely of re-introduced birds at this point) come down to drink at the spring in the early morning and at dusk. During migration, Black-chinned and Black-throated Sparrows, Costa's and other hummingbirds, and other species rare in the region might be found. White-throated Swifts and Great Horned Owls regularly nest in the cliffs above the bowl and/or other nearby areas.

You have two options from here: one is to go back to the flat, basaltic rocky flat at the entrance to the bowl and go up the steep hiking trail instead of back to your car. This is the beginning of a loop trail that traverses some exceptionally steep and tricky terrain, but which gets you into some beautiful coastal sage scrub habitat and eventually loops back

via a trail down the canyon to the asphalt road and back to your car. One can go at least a short distance up this trail for the excellent ocean and island views.

A much easier way to view the cliffs and access the upper canyon, however, is to simply walk back to where you parked and continue walking uphill along the paved road. In either case, watch along the cliffs for any of the birds you missed in the quarry bowl, plus Cassin's Kingbird, raptors, and migrants. If you take the asphalt road, hike up to where the road turns left, but continue straight instead onto a dirt path that takes you to the end of the canyon. This area and the top of the hill to your left are also good spots for birding and observing wildflowers, Miocene fossils, and some interesting metamorphic rocks and crystals.

By now you may have encountered a California Gnatcatcher. (If you haven't, read on to the next section, or wait until the one that is foraging silently in the bush next to you pops up.) Your first clue that the gnatcatcher you are watching isn't a Blue-gray is that the latter is virtually absent from early March until late September. The best field mark is actually the call: the California's is a rising, then dropping, kitten-like mew, clearly different and less assertive than the *speeee* call of the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. The breeding male's black cap is a good mark. The *Sibley Guide to the Birds* gives a good overall treatment of these species.

The Palos Verdes Peninsula represents virtually the northwestern-most limit of the California Gnatcatcher's range (a few were discovered recently in Ventura County). The California Gnatcatcher inhabits arid late-successional and climax sage scrub in gullies, canyons, lower slopes, and washes. This habitat has been largely eliminated by rampant development, but many of the precious remaining fragments are protected and are being restored locally. The number of breeding pairs of California Gnatcatchers seems to fluctuate significantly from year to year; ongoing studies have yet to determine the net impacts of habitat restoration versus overall habitat loss, but it appears to local birders that populations are steadily increasing.

Perhaps the easiest place locally, if not one of the better locations in the state, to find California Gnatcatchers, Cactus Wrens, Rufous-crowned and other sparrows and other coastal scrub specialties is along the coastal walking trails at the new **Ocean Trails** development. In 2006 the area is still under construction, but as a condition of the luxury housing/golf development, and enforced by lawsuits and a lot of work by determined preservationists, a narrow strip of prime habitat along the coast has been preserved for walkers and wildlife. An excellent restoration project continues, and the area is worth visiting simply for the lush and diverse native vegetation, the breathtaking views of the ocean and Catalina Island, and the lovely picnicking opportunities afforded after a long and leisurely stroll along the ocean bluffs.

There is a better place to access the area than the "official" trailhead at the golf headquarters on Ocean Trails Drive (directly opposite and downhill from Forrestal Rd.); instead, enter from a gated lot that can be reached by going .9 miles southeast from the Forrestal/Ocean Trails junction along Palos Verdes Drive South. Turn right on La Rotonda, bear right downhill, and at the cul-de-sac, turn right into the lot. Keep in mind that the gate may be locked at sunset! There is a restroom at the trailhead.

Walk down the concrete pathway, paying extra care to avoid straying onto the golf cart paths while watching for silent speeding carts where pedestrian and golf paths cross! Stray golf balls are an additional hazard, so be vigilant. The restored vegetation along the path is rich in coastal scrub and willow riparian birds, and the ponds you will see on the left and right are worth checking, but the best birding is to come, so continue until you hit the coastal bluff.

You can follow the bluff trail in either direction, although it seems best to start by heading left (southeast). Avoid the temptation to scan the water and rocks below or to take any of the side trails to the water; there are better places for rocky shore, pelagic, and sandy beach species. You are now in prime California Gnatcatcher country. Follow the trail until it rises up and over a rocky section where you will see dense prickly pear and cholla cactus, this area is particularly productive. Throughout the area, depending upon the season, the remnant and restored stands of Lemonadeberry, Coast Sagebrush, Bush Sunflower, and many other native plants are also good for Say's Phoebe, Western Kingbird, a variety of wintering Sparrows, and more. Of course, if you can't resist, look above the cliffs for swifts and swallows and out over the water for Western and Clark's Grebes, Black Oystercatchers, Brown Pelican, California's three cormorants, and gulls, terns, and the occasional pelagic bird. It is likely that the entire Ocean Trails area, as well as White's Point Park (see below) will begin to turn up exciting new (as well as long absent) species, in addition to migrants and vagrants, due to the optimal locations on coastal promontories combined with the presence of healthy reintroduced natural habitats.

Pelagic birding by scope can be excellent on the PV Peninsula. One place you can try is the Point Vicente Park and Interpretive Center, where you can again look over the ocean for pelagic species, best in spring. From the intersection of Hawthorne Blvd. and PV Drive West, go left (south/southeast) .4 mile and make a hard right at the entrance, adjacent to the Point Vicente lighthouse. This park was built in 1985 and recently expanded and re-dedicated, serving mainly as a whale-watching area. (Gray Whales may be seen offshore between December and April.) The hours are 10 AM until 5 PM, closed holidays. At dawn or dusk you can usually see or call in a Great Horned Owl at the adjacent lighthouse.

A better place to spot pelagic species, however, is the **Point Vicente Public Fishing Access Lot**, which you can reach by continuing just .5 miles beyond the Interpretive Center, along Palos Verdes Drive West/South (the road changes name at this point.) This lot is always open, offers a public restroom, and you can scope offshore or at the cliffs behind you to your heart's content. Hooded Orioles nest in the California Fan Palms at the east end of the park, and you might hear (and even see, if you use a scope) Cactus Wrens, California Gnatcatchers, and Rufous-crowned Sparrows behind you on the cliffs. During spring migration this is a great place to spot Western Kingbirds and other migrants.

You came here, however, for the excellent show of coastal and pelagic species offshore; if you arrive at the right time (especially in early morning) and season you will see remarkable numbers and diversity. The loon show alone is worth the trip: in addition to wintering birds, look for large numbers of Red-throateds (late March to early April)

Pacifics (mid-April through May), and Commons (early April to early May). In late summer through early spring, check for Black-vented Shearwaters just offshore (in winter it is possible to see up to 10,000 go by in a few hours). Also watch for Northern Fulmar (winter), Sooty and Pink-footed Shearwaters (late spring through early fall), Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers, Royal, Forster's (winter), Caspian, and Elegant Terns (spring and summer), and phalaropes (spring migration). If you arrive early and look carefully, Xantus's Murrelets (mainly spring), Cassin's Auklet (year round), and Rhinoceros Auklet (winter) are all possibilities. Of course, check the flocks of Surf Scoters for White-wings and Blacks, and watch for marine mammals while you're at it.

For hikers, there is a steep trail to the rocky beach below, which may in winter yield rocky-shore birds, but Royal Palms (see below) is a more accessible and reliable spot for all of these.

For rocky shorebirds, return to the intersection of Forrestal Drive and Palos Verdes Drive South, then continue on until Palos Verdes Drive turns into 25th Street and intersects Western Avenue (2.3). Go right on Western Avenue toward the ocean. When Western Avenue ends (0.5), bear left onto Paseo del Mar. Go one block and make a sharp right turn down the hill to the **Royal Palms State Beach** on White Point (fee). Better yet, if you want to save some time and money, park on the cliff at either side of the entrance and scope from the cliffs. At a bluff about 100 yards west of the entrance you can get an excellent view of all of the Southern California rocky-shore birds out on the rocks past the lifeguard tower or on the exposed rocks to the east. At first it may appear that there are only a few gulls, cormorants or pelicans, but be patient and look closely. The shorebirds are present! If you arrive at high tide you might find Black Oystercatcher, Surfbird, Wandering Tattler, Whimbrel, and both turnstones, not to mention all three cormorants, a variety of gulls, and more shorebirds on the rocks, but low tide will often be better for more actively feeding groups. For any of these that you miss, continue on Paseo del Mar, stopping along the way to scope the rocks.

An exciting "new" birding location that has local birders buzzing is **White Point Nature Preserve**, which you may have noticed on the opposite side of the road from royal palms. It is best accessed at an inconspicuous gated entrance only .2 mile further east along Paseo Del Mar. Park along the ocean side of the street (by the time you read this, the planned "official" entrance and parking lot near this point but on the actual site may be installed) and plan for a one-hour walk along the trails that skirt the Preserve, and perhaps one of the trails that bisect it.

This recently protected broad, rolling habitat has just (2005) been opened to the public. Due to ongoing restoration efforts, it already contains thriving coastal sage scrub habitat, with accompanying California Gnatcatchers and the other expected species, including a few Blue Grosbeaks. However, the Preserve's topography and location, and especially the large and expanding native grassland restoration component, virtually guarantee an assemblage of species found nowhere else on the Peninsula. First check the area surrounding the sycamore trees near the entrance for sparrows and warblers, then go left (west) along the perimeter trail. This will get you into the best native bunchgrass and tall grass habitat. This area is excellent for a wide variety of sparrows, and it seems merely a matter of time until Grasshopper Sparrows show up and consider breeding. Say's and Black Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike (now rare here), Western Meadowlark, and more

winter here. In 2006 a migrant Sage Thrasher showed up, a good omen for future discoveries (please let us know what *you* find, by filling out and depositing the checklist available at the entrance!)

About 1.6 miles past Royal Palms you arrive at Point Fermin Park in San Pedro. The pines, magnolias and other trees occasionally draw some interesting migrants. Anna's and Allen's Hummingbirds are common all year, and flocks of Cedar Waxwings frequent the park in season. Don't be surprised if you see some Mitred Parakeets flying around.

On the cliffs below the lighthouse, you may find Double-crested, Brandt's, and Pelagic (possibly breeding) Cormorants. Black Oystercatchers and other rocky shorebirds are occasionally seen here. Sometimes this is a good spot for pelagic scoping.

From the park, turn right onto Shepard Street to Pacific Avenue and jog right to Bluff Place, which leads down the hill to Cabrillo Beach (0.6) (fee for parking, although you can park above the entrance and walk in for free). The free museum has fine marine exhibits. The main attraction here is the **San Pedro Breakwater**.

The beach here can be a great place to compare tern species (Forster's, Royal, Elegant, Caspian, and Least) on the buoys just offshore. Along the beach, check for a Black Skimmer colony (regular here), along with Heermann's, Ring-billed, California, Mew, Glaucous-Winged and Western Gulls. Thayer's, Bonaparte's and even less common gulls have shown up here in the past. Later in the morning the crowds and jet-skis inevitably disperse the birds. At dawn there is a good chance of seeing a few pelagic birds. They often come close to shore at night, but move out to sea as the boats leave the harbor.

By walking the pier and the beach in early morning, you can find nearly all of the birds that frequent the inshore ocean and bays. At the base of the pier it is occasionally possible to find virtually all of the regular rocky shorebirds, especially as they flock at high tide. If you decide to walk out on the pier, you can get excellent looks at Surf Scoters and possibly other sea ducks, loons, grebes, and the like.

Further afield, in the coastal lowlands or along the coast, are a few more spots that shouldn't be missed by visiting birders. Four of them are included below.

Hopkins Wilderness Park. Located in Redondo Beach on Sepulveda east of Prospect (10 AM until 4 PM, closed Wednesdays.) From the 405 Freeway, take the Crenshaw exit and go south on Crenshaw to 190th Street (0.4). Turn right (west) to Prospect Avenue (3.0). Go left again to Camino Real/Sepulveda (2.0) and turn right (Camino Real is on the south side, Sepulveda on the north). At the first light (0.1) turn left into the parking lot. Carefully bird the alders along the stream that runs through the park and the trees over the pond in the lower, back portion of the park. This park can be a great place for a wide variety of migrants, and is an especially good spot for *Empidonax* and other flycatchers. At one time or another, nearly every eastern warbler or vireo species that makes it to the west coast somehow winds up here. A Plumbeous Vireo and a Black-and-white Warbler or two are nearly always found here in fall among the Orange-crowned, "Myrtle", "Audubon's", and Townsend's Warblers. In most winters, montane and northern species such as Red-breasted Nuthatch, Red Crossbill, and Pine Siskin can be found, sometimes in remarkable numbers.

Madrona Marsh This somewhat isolated spot in Torrance is very productive. Local birders and conservationists fought a pitched battle in the early 1980's to save this beautiful vernal (seasonal) marsh, and it was well worth it! The bird list is nearing 250 and constantly rising as birds and birders discover the excellent, regionally scarce, restored freshwater wetland and upland habitats. Excellent management here guarantees that the birding, already remarkable, will continue to improve. The best time to visit is after substantial rains have begun in November or December, until the water is nearly gone in July or August. From the 405 Freeway, take Crenshaw south to Sepulveda (2.7) and go right to Madrona Avenue (1.0). Turn right and, if water is present, stop and behold on your right the southwest corner of a lovely oasis in the middle of a highly urbanized area. Park to the right (pull off all the way to the fence; usually you can safely ignore the No Parking signs if you do so) and observe from outside the wrought-iron fence, or go through any of the gates, most of which are usually open. A trail loops through the park, but some of the best viewing can be done from here, outside the fence (in this case, afternoon is best, since otherwise you will be looking east into the morning sun.) A wide assortment of ducks is the main draw, although Sora, Virginia Rail (rare), Black-crowned Night-Heron (common) and other herons, Black Phoebe (and recently, breeding Say's Phoebe!) Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, Red-winged and, occasionally, Tricolored Blackbirds also occur here. Check the mud at the edge of the reeds for a good variety of shorebirds. Solitary Sandpipers seem to pass through regularly during migration, and sometimes stick for the winter. Next, proceed to the official entrance across from the Visitor's Center; get there by continuing ahead .1 mile to the first intersection, Plaza Del Amo (0.2) turn right, and then make a quick left at the first light into the Visitor Center lot. Check in at the beautiful center, where you may choose to explore the bookstore and exhibits, then get a checklist and ask about recent sightings. Proceed across the street to the main entrance to the preserve.

Regular (in season) upland species include Red-shouldered Hawk and the other common Southern California raptors, Anna's and Allen's Hummingbirds, Say's and Black Phoebes, Cassin's and Western Kingbirds, Hooded and Bullock's Orioles, Western Meadowlark, and Lesser and American Goldfinches. All the western swallows show up in migration, especially Northern Rough-winged, Cliff, and Barn. The willows can be excellent for warblers and migrants. Check the willows and reeds for Pacific Slope, Willow, and other *Empidonax* flycatchers (in season). The shrubby areas near the entrance, as well as the lowland areas of the preserve (when not inundated with water) are particularly good for wintering sparrows, and nearly anything can (and has!) shown up.

Sand Dune Park in Manhattan Beach. Especially considering its small size, this is an exceptional place for migrants and very good for eastern vagrants that have overshot the coast and found their way back to the only isolated green spot along a heavily urbanized coastline. Take the West Rosecrans exit off the 405 Freeway in Hawthorne. Go west to Bell Avenue (2.5), then left to the end of the street (0.2) and park. Weekday mornings are best. Walk the trails up, down, and around the cliff to the right, just past the sand dune slope. Birds move in and out of the park from the trees in the adjoining neighborhood, so keep a (respectful) eye out for birds there.

Sand Dune Park is good in spring, even better in fall, and worth a visit in winter. This spot *always* has something interesting at these seasons, and is famous among the locals. Check out the flowering silk-oaks (*Grevillea*) when in bloom. There are usually a few interesting flycatchers (particularly empids) warblers, buntings, sparrows and more. Western Tanagers and orioles frequently winter here.

Alondra Park which straddles north Torrance and eastern Manhattan Beach is another excellent migrant trap and always has a few interesting wintering birds. If you want full-frame photos of Canvasback in winter, this is the place! This semi-urban park, which has a variety of trees surrounding a concrete-lined artificial lake, is easy to bird and, surprisingly, almost always has something interesting to offer. Watch for Hooded Merganser and other locally-uncommon ducks and gulls on and surrounding the island in the lake. From the 405 Freeway in Torrance, take the Crenshaw Blvd. exit North 1 mile. Turn left and after about .3 mile go right into the parking lot. The lake should be directly in front of you. Some of the best birding is in the tree and lake area adjacent to the parking lot, but it is best to stroll around the lake and walk to the pines or silk-oaks as you follow your intuition, unfamiliar songs, or flashes of movement. Depending upon the day and season, the coral trees, *Ficus*, Chinese elms, and sycamores around the park can also be productive.

A generous local birder, David Moody, has compiled and will send you, free of charge, a checklist that includes many of the above areas, plus several others, with the request that you send word of any additions back to him. Send him a self-addressed stamped, legal-sized or larger envelope with the correct U.S. 2-ounce postage and your request at 315-B North Gertruda, Redondo Beach, CA 90277.

Byhower is a Private Local Bird Guide in his area and serves as Immediate Past President of the Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Chapter. Contact him at avitropic@sbcglobal.net, or visit his website, birdingsocal.com for information about his guiding service.

Good maps of the area include the Los Angeles/Orange County Thomas Guide and the AAA Metropolitan Los Angeles Southern Area map. There are no campgrounds along the Palos Verdes Peninsula route, but motels are abundant in the communities surrounding the peninsula.