

Birds of the Shasta-Trinity

Shasta-Trinity National Forest



Introduction... Birds are a gift of nature found throughout the Shasta-Trinity. Bird lore enthusiasts can find plentiful subjects for study here, from the very common and obvious Steller's jay, who can mimic hawks and Douglas squirrels, to the illusive little winter wren who prefers to hide in brush. The Shasta-Trinity National Forests covers a varied landscape, from rugged, high mountain peaks and lush stream-side valleys to open meadows and high volcanic desert. Birds have found a niche in all of them and patient birders will have no trouble finding them at any time of the year no matter where they look. Following are descriptions of some of the more common and interesting birds found throughout this area...



Jays... There are two species of jays in this area, the Stellar's Jay and the Scrub Jay. The Stellar's Jay (shown at left) sports a vibrant, two tone, blue coat and a magnificent topknot. The Scrub jay is a light blue and gray and has no topknot. Both are noisy birds with raucous voices who use their keen eyesight to locate intruders and warn of their presence.



Red-breasted Nuthatch

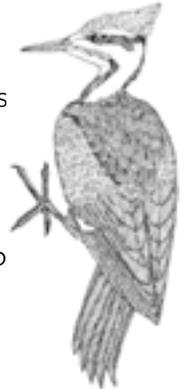
Poorwill... These birds are not often seen because they are never out during the day. They are nocturnal birds related to the eastern whip-poor-will, and belong to the night-hawk or goatsucker family. They have big eyes, wide mouths and small beaks designed for flying at night and catching insects.



Nuthatches... There are three nuthatches common to this area, the White-breasted, the Red-breasted (shown at left), and the Pygmy. The nuthatch is the only tree climber that habitually walks down the trunks of trees head first looking for insects. They are tiny, wren-sized birds with a woodpecker-like beak who frequent conifer forests.

Woodpeckers... Using its stiff tail as a prop, the woodpecker drills into trees for wood and bark boring insects. Its flight is undulating. The pileated woodpecker is the giant among woodpeckers and is almost twice as big as the acorn woodpecker. The pileated has a loud voice and is striking in appearance with its black and white flashing underwings, white neck stripes and red topknot. Other woodpeckers include the Common flicker, the Acorn woodpecker, Lewis' woodpecker, the Yellow-bellied sapsucker, Williamson's sapsucker, the Hairy woodpecker, the Downy woodpecker, Nuttall's woodpecker, the White-headed woodpecker and the Black-backed three-toed woodp

Pileated Woodpecker



Yellow-breasted Chat

Warblers... The yellow-breasted chat is the largest of the many warblers found in this area. It is heard more often than actually seen, often carrying on a conversation with itself in a nearby brush thicket. The chat is one of the few birds who sometimes sings while in flight. Its loud, sharp voice sounds amplified, and it repeats an amazing repertoire of caws, whistles, grunts and rattles all day long and often into the night.

Black-Headed Grosbeak... With its cheerful, one syllable "eek" or its melodious song echoing through the trees, the black-headed grosbeak nests in great numbers throughout the area. Its cousin, the evening grosbeak, is only seen occasionally, usually during migration flights. The grosbeak's bill is short and stout for seed cracking. There are several other seed eaters, related to the grosbeak, which are common to the area, including the towhees, pine siskin, lazuli bunting, juncos, sparrows, finches and goldfinches.



Black-headed Grosbeak



Mountain chickadee... These friendly little birds (similar in size to the nuthatch) are very acrobatic and travel in small flocks, moving from tree to tree in search of insects hiding in branches and leaves. They have black bibs, dark caps, and their song is a "chick-a-dee-dee-dee." Throughout the summer months they are commonly seen in the high country where they nest and feed.

Mountain Chickadee

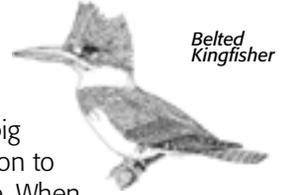
Great Blue Heron



Great Blue Heron... This bird is frequently seen along the edges of streams and lakes. It is second only to the sandhill crane in size among herons and cranes found in the west. Standing 4 feet high and having a wing span up to 6 feet, the heron holds its head in and stretches its long legs behind when it flies. The great blue heron feeds mostly on fish, frogs and crayfish, and occasionally eats mice and insects.

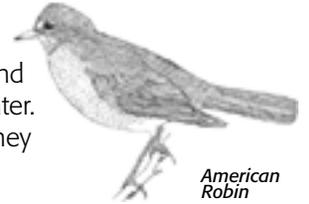
Belted Kingfisher... This is another bird that commonly frequents the waterways of the Shasta-Trinity. Its loud rattling call can be heard above the noise of the streams as it flies low over the water. This bird, with its big crested head and large bill has a rather unproportioned look in comparison to other birds. It is larger than a robin and has blue-grey and white plumage. When fishing, it often sits on low branches above water, or hovers on rapidly beating wings over water while it searches with keen eyes for fish. When it spots its prey it dives quickly into the water head first. It rarely misses.

Belted Kingfisher



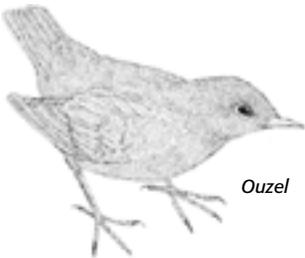
Robin... The robin is a common, red-breasted thrush familiar to nearly everyone. This bird can be found in large numbers throughout the Shasta-Trinity, nesting in this area and migrating through in fall and winter. Robins sometimes strip the native madrone trees and domestic pyracantha bushes of their berries as they migrate through. Among songbirds, the robin is one of the finest singers.

American Robin



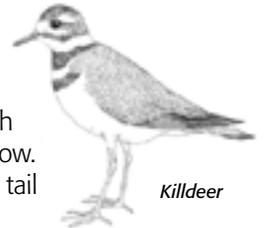
Dipper or Water Ouzel... This dark gray bird is seen alongside or in streams, bobbing its body up and down while standing in one place. It dives, swims under water, and walks along the bottoms of streams finding insects other birds are not able to reach. Special oil glands waterproof the dipper's feathers. This was John Muir's favorite bird.

Ouzel



Killdeer... Called a "shore bird," the killdeer is also found along streams and elsewhere. Its loud "killdeah" call rises above the noise of fast water, and it runs characteristically in short stops and starts. To distract intruders from its nest, it will flop about as though mortally wounded. Its feathers are dark colored on top, lighter below. A white ring circles the neck with light orange or tan on the upper tail and lower back. The killdeer feeds mostly on small marine life.

Killdeer



Western Tanager... The colorful western tanager is found throughout the Shasta-Trinity wherever conifers are the predominant cover type. The western tanager has a yellow body with red head and black wings and is the only North American tanager with wing bars. The tanager has a heavy bill and eats insects and small fruits.

Owls... The screech owl is the most commonly seen, and heard, owl in this area. This owl is small, only 8" long, and has "ear" tufts. It is heavier in appearance than the pygmy owl (also common) and has a barred pattern on its breast. It is an elevation bird, frequenting ponderosa pine and black oak habitats as well as areas along streams. This owl eats insects primarily, but also captures rodent frogs, lizards and small birds. It hunts during evening and night hours. The spotted owl is a larger bird than the screech owl but frequents old-growth forest. The spotted owl is rarely seen but its larger cousin, the great horned owl is seen occasionally.

Screech owl



Barn Swallow

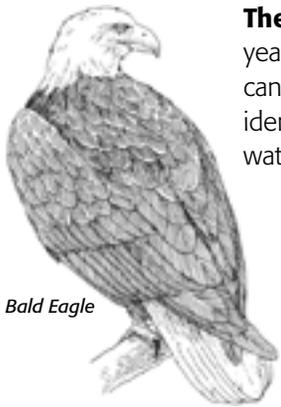


Swallows... These slim, graceful sparrow-sized birds have long wings and forked tails. They are usually seen in flocks, catching insects in their bills while flying, usually over water. Swallows are common all over the Shasta-Trinity. Most types have dark feathers on top and light feathers underneath. The barn swallows, one of the species found here, commonly nest under the eaves of buildings.

Hummingbirds... This is the only bird that can fly backwards! The tiny hummingbird sips nectar from flowers, favoring the color red, with its extraordinarily long beak. In flight the wings are mere blurs, the rapid wingbeat producing the humming sound for which it is named. The males are flashy in color, while females and young are difficult to identify by species. According to experts, some hummingbirds are not safely distinguishable in the field.

Annas Hummingbird

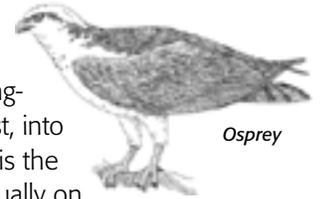




Bald Eagle

The Bald Eagle... America's national bird, has made a dramatic comeback in this territory in the past few years. These birds are year round residents, especially near Trinity and Shasta Lakes and the major rivers. They can be seen fishing even in high country lakes where they often compete with osprey. The adults are easily identified by their white heads and tails, dark brown body and striking yellow beaks and feet. They nest near water and prefer nesting sites that offer seclusion.

Osprey... The osprey, also called the "fish hawk" for many years, is recognized by its large size and partially white body. With a 4 1/2' to 6' wingspan, it hovers 50 - 150 feet above the water and then plunges, talons first, into the water, often continuing down under the water in order to catch fish. It is the only hawk that dives into the water. The osprey's nest is made of sticks usually on top of an old snag. Unlike eagles, ospreys, nest in exposed sites and migrate south for the winter.



Osprey



Hawks... Several species of hawks are common throughout this area. Most recognizable is probably the red-tailed hawk which soars over lower elevation woodlands searching for rodents, lizards and smaller birds. Its red tail is highly recognizable as it passes overhead. Other hawks common to the Shasta-Trinity are the Goshawk, Sharp-shinned, and Cooper's.

Turkey vulture... These large birds are most often noticed as they glide in the air, circling in search of carrion on the ground. With a 6 foot wingspan, their outline shows a broad "V" high in the sky. The adult has a bald head and neck. Immature vultures have blackish heads. As they fly overhead a vulture's wingtips display "fingers," (feathers spread apart), as opposed to eagles or hawks whose wingtips appear more uniform making them easy to identify from a distance.

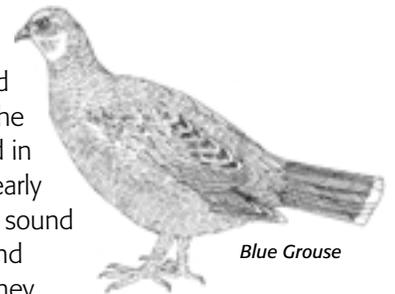


Turkey Vulture



Ravens... The subject of a poem by Edgar Allen Poe, the raven is found throughout the Shasta-Trinity National Forests. Larger and blacker than the common crow, the raven has a deep crackling voice and eats carrion rather than being a pest of farmer's crops. They soar much like hawks and are often mistaken for them, especially when viewed against a light sky. Their call usually gives them away.

Grouse... Two varieties of grouse inhabit the Shasta-Trinity, the ruffed and the blue. The ruffed grouse is a lower elevation bird while the blue makes its home in the higher elevation areas. The blue grouse feeds on the needles, buds and pollen cones of conifers through the summer and in winter eats seeds, berries and insects. Males of both varieties attract females each spring and early summer by "drumming" the air with rapidly beating wings, usually while perched on a log. The sound has actually been mistaken for the starting of a small one-cylinder engine, frequently starting and stopping. Hikers in the highcountry can be startled by the sudden drumming and might think they are in close company with a growling bear.



Blue Grouse



Quail... California and Mountain quail are found throughout the Shasta-Trinity National Forests. California quail, identified by their tear drop shaped topknot, frequent the lower elevations. Mountain quail with their long, thin, erect topknot, favor higher elevations. Both favor the edges of woods and brushy areas near open meadows and grassy areas near water. Mountain quail migrate in winter to the lower elevations frequented by California quail. Both varieties live and move in coveys made up of several birds.

Turkey... This is an introduced bird highly prized by hunters in the spring and fall. They are large birds closely resembling their domesticated cousins, but are shy and easily spooked. They tend to favor gray pine and oak woodlands with scattered grassy openings where they can for insects, acorns, seeds, and fruit.



The USDA Forest Service has set aside several areas on the Shasta-Trinity that offer excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing. They include:

- White's Bar on the Trinity River west of Big Bar. This site lies along a neotropical bird migration route and is an excellent place to visit during the fall and spring migrations.
- Sven-Olbertson Side Channel on the Trinity River just below Lewiston Dam and Hatchery. This is an excellent site for viewing all kinds of wildlife favoring riparian habitat. From bald eagles and ospreys to egrets and migrating songbirds, as well as salmon, steelhead and a variety of mammals, amphibians and reptiles.
- Lewiston lake marshes between Cooper Gulch Campground and Pine Cove Boat Ramp. This is another wonderful site for viewing a variety of birds... many species of ducks, herons, eagles, ospreys and songbirds. A canoe or boat is helpful for gaining access to the best parts of the marsh.
- Packer's Bay Boat Ramp on Shasta Lake. This is an excellent site for viewing bald eagles and osprey.
- Jones Valley Boat Ramp on Shasta Lake. This is another great site for eagle and osprey viewing.
- The Upper McCloud River near Fowler's Campground. This site is excellent for viewing kingfishers, American dippers, Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks, and migrating songbirds in spring and fall.

There are several other wildlife viewing sites scattered throughout the Shasta-Cascade region surrounding the Shasta-Trinity National Forests, among them:

- Butte Valley Basin, Shasta Valley Wildlife Area, McArthur-Burney Falls State Park, Big Lake-Ahjumawi Lava Springs State Park, Beaver Creek, Ash Creek Wildlife Area, Lassen Volcanic National Park, Eagle Lake, Bizz Johnson Trail, Modoc National Wildlife Refuge, Kelly Reservoir, Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges, Henski Wildlife Viewing Area, Biscar Wildlife Area, Honey Lake Wildlife Area, Eagle Lake.

For more information on these sites, and directions for accessing them, refer to the California Wildlife Viewing Guide published by Falcon Press available at some Shasta-Trinity National Forest Ranger Stations.

Also available is the "Bird Checklist" for the Shasta-Trinity National Forests. This brochure, which can be used for tracking your sightings, can be found at all Forest Service Ranger Stations on the Shasta-Trinity, including the Supervisor's Office in Redding.



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