

Bird Species Regularly Utilizing the lower San Lorenzo River area in Santa Cruz

This list includes species with a regular pattern of occurrence along the San Lorenzo River from Hwy 1 to the mouth (excluding rarities, and species that are very irregular or marginal to the river habitat).

Also excluded are a number of primarily ocean, bay, and beach species that occasionally go a very short distance up the river in the vicinity of the mouth (e.g. Surf Scoter, Brown Pelican, Black Turnstone, Elegant Tern, etc.).

Confirmed and Probable Breeding Species

Wood Duck- a small number breed along the river in Santa Cruz, most a short distance north of Hwy 1; broods of young regularly seen foraging downstream to San Lorenzo Park and occasionally farther; others breed nearby at Neary Lagoon and further up the San Lorenzo (nests in tree cavities, etc.); possible on the river all year, though much of the local population retreats to Neary Lagoon for a couple of months in mid-summer for eclipse molt.

Mallard (a)- common year-around resident, breeds commonly

Common Merganser- fairly common resident on the river, with broods of young utilizing the entire stretch as far as the mouth; perhaps most or all nesting is north of Hwy 1, but the families of young move quickly downstream (or perhaps a few nesting sites are south of the highway, but required cavities in trees, etc. seem sparse or non-existent in the lower stretch)

Pied-billed Grebe (a)- some present all year; more common in winter, but some breed around calm pools in the river throughout

Double-crested Cormorant- a few breed (but not every year) in the large Eucalyptus just above the trestle near the mouth; more use these trees for roosting, and they regularly forage in the river (a large colony is nearby at Schwan Lake)

Green Heron- some likely breed within the river corridor, but confirmed recent nest sites have actually been in urban trees in the adjacent downtown area (Pacific Avenue, Cedar St., etc.) But foraging (nesting adults, juveniles after fledging) takes place almost entirely within the river corridor. Some utilize the river at all seasons, though less common

Cooper's Hawk- no breeding confirmations in the immediate area, but regular presence in the breeding season in recent years suggests likely nesting in or near this area; may be found at all seasons

Red-shouldered Hawk- A common resident raptor noted at all seasons along the river, especially in areas with more trees. Some confirmed nestings toward the north end (nearer Hwy 1) in recent years

Killdeer (a)- Resident in the general area, and nests on sandbars and shores along the river at least some (perhaps most) years. Use of the river dependent on water levels.

Rock Pigeon- Abundant resident. Nest sites are often on bridges or building in the area.

Eurasian Collared-Dove- Common and increasing resident; nesting confirmations have been in larger trees near the river.

Mourning Dove- Common resident breeder, utilizing a variety of nest sites along and near the river.

Anna's Hummingbird (a)- Common resident and nesting species in various habitats.

Downy Woodpecker- Breeds mostly from the San Lorenzo Park area up; some present all year
American Kestrel- One pair nested near the river up until recently, but there have been no successful nestings reported in recent years. Perhaps no longer breeds, though individuals are occasionally seen in or near the river corridor.

Black Phoebe- Common resident. They regularly build their mud nests on bridges and other structures near the river.

Steller's Jay- Uncommon resident in spots near the river with larger/thicker groves of trees, with a few possibly breeding as far down as Broadway. Becomes very common upstream of Hwy 1.

Western Scrub-Jay- Fairly common resident, some breed in areas with trees

American Crow- Common and increasing resident. Some nest in larger trees in the vicinity of the river.

Common Raven-regularly noted along the river corridor, and nests not too far from the area. A few may breed adjacent to the river corridor (on buildings or large trees?), but not confirmed for the immediate area

Northern Rough-winged Swallow- rather common nesting species along most of the lower river, utilizing primarily openings in the bridges as nesting cavities. Present mostly early March to August.

Violet-green Swallow- common breeding species, in this area utilizing various openings in buildings as nesting cavities (vents, under roof tiles, etc.). Elsewhere nearby (including just north of Hwy. 1) makes much use of woodpecker holes and other cavities in trees, and perhaps nests in this sort of situation locally south of Hwy. 1. Nesters are present mostly very early March to the end of July, but some migrants occur later.

Cliff Swallow- Common nester along the river, building mud nests on the bridges and on nearby buildings. Arrives mostly in mid-March, but nesting on the river may not start immediately. Usually most leave by the end of August.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee- common resident (mostly north of Broadway), nesting where there are moderate-sized to larger trees.

Oak Titmouse- fairly common resident, nesting in moderate to large trees near the river. This species appears to be increasing in the urban/suburban Santa Cruz area in recent years.

Bushtit (a)- common resident, breeds in various trees and shrubs along and near the river

American Robin- localized breeder in areas with larger trees, more common (sometimes abundant) in winter

Northern Mockingbird- rather common resident, with some nesting near the river.

European Starling- abundant and ubiquitous resident throughout downtown Santa Cruz

Common Yellowthroat (a)- a few pairs probably breed in marshy habitat along the river (based on apparently territorial singing males, etc.); somewhat more common in winter

California Towhee (a)- Rather common breeding resident throughout

Song Sparrow (a)- Year-round resident, common breeder, and one of the most characteristic species of the river channel habitats. Nests in weeds, willows, marsh vegetation, etc. Less numerous closer to the mouth.

Dark-eyed Junco- breeds in localized spots with larger trees near the river, more common from San Lorenzo Park upstream; all-year resident; breeding presence and range in urban/suburban areas of Santa Cruz has increased in recent years

Red-winged Blackbird (a)- breeds in weeds, marsh, and willows in the river channel, possibly increasing in recent years; present all year

Brewer's Blackbird- resident throughout downtown Santa Cruz, nesting in parking lot trees, city parks, etc.; regularly forage along the levees

Brown-headed Cowbird- Rather common in the nesting season, irregularly present the rest of the year. A nest parasite that lays its eggs in the nests of other species (Song Sparrow and California Towhee are fairly regular hosts, but many species may be parasitized.)

Hooded Oriole- fairly common nester near the river, mostly in palms and other ornamental trees, post-breeders commonly forage in willows, etc. within the river corridor; present mostly mid-March to early September

House Finch (a)- Very common year-round resident, many breed.

Lesser Goldfinch (a)- Breeding not confirmed, but a few likely breed here and there in shrubby and weedy habitat; some present all year

House Sparrow- Common resident. Nests in cavities in buildings, bridges, old Cliff Swallow nests, etc.

(a)= confirmed or probable nest locations inside of the levees, either in river bottom vegetation or on river banks and islands

Do Not Breed in the immediate Lower San Lorenzo area, but present with some regularity in the breeding season

Canada Goose-possible all year, a few breed in the nearby area

Great Blue Heron- some present all year, some breed near the Santa Cruz Harbor

Great Egret- some present all year

Snowy Egret- some present all year, sometimes numerous in fall and winter

Black-crowned Night-Heron- some present all year

Osprey- occasionally noted along the river channel at any season; perhaps most common in migration

Red-tailed Hawk- resident in the area and breeds nearby, but apparently not in the immediate river area; regularly forages along the river channel, especially in winter

American Coot- often abundant in winter, just a few remain through the summer, with no evidence of breeding (a few nest elsewhere in the Santa Cruz area)

California Gull-often abundant in winter; non-breeders (mostly immatures) are fairly common in summer

Caspian Tern- regular visitor March to August, sometimes common

Band-tailed Pigeon- irregularly forages near the river, most probably traveling from nearby forests

Belted Kingfisher- fishes along the river at any season, but sparse from March to June; breeds further upstream along the San Lorenzo and elsewhere in the general area, but no evidence of breeding in the "in town" portion of the river

Peregrine Falcon- rather regular visitor, mostly in the non-breeding season (few records March-June); more frequent along the lower stretch of the river, especially when ducks, coots, gulls, etc. are numerous

Tree Swallow- rather sparse migrant and dispersant along the river corridor; a very local breeder in the immediate Santa Cruz area, and breeding season records are probably mostly wanderers from the small colonies at Neary Lagoon, Schwan Lake, etc.

Barn Swallow-apparently none breed in the immediate area of the river, but a regular nester elsewhere in the Santa Cruz area; present mostly March to early October

Breed in habitats adjacent to the Lower San Lorenzo area (especially in the somewhat more natural riparian north of Hwy 1), and occasionally disperse within the breeding season (many of these are regular at other times of year as non-breeding visitors).

Many of these could breed in the lower river area if there were somewhat more natural habitat conditions

Allen's Hummingbird

Nuttall's Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker

Western Wood-Pewee

Pacific-slope Flycatcher- common nester (March-September) nearby, and migrant along the lower river; nesting in some spots from San Lorenzo Park up not impossible, but no strong evidence

Hutton's Vireo- regular on the lower river in the non-breeding season, to around Broadway

Warbling Vireo- rather common as a migrant and post-breeding dispersant on the lower river

Pygmy Nuthatch-some may nest in the San Lorenzo Park area, also in vicinity of Ocean View Park

Brown Creeper- possibly may nest in the San Lorenzo Park area; a few nest at Ocean View Park and vicinity

Bewick's Wren- numerous resident nearby, occasional wanderer to the lower river corridor

Swainson's Thrush

Yellow Warbler- declining as a breeder in Central California; probably the closest current nesting is in the Felton area; rather common on the lower river as a migrant

Wilson's Warbler- common as a migrant on the lower river

Spotted Towhee- numerous resident nearby, regular on the lower river in winter

Black-headed Grosbeak- rather common migrant and dispersant along at least the upper stretch of the lower river

Purple Finch

Migrants, Winter Residents, and other non-breeders present only or primarily at certain times of the year

Greater White-fronted Goose- uncommon but regular migrant, and sometimes in winter; September to April

Cackling Goose- uncommon but regular migrant, and sometimes in winter, October to April

Green-winged Teal- uncommon, mostly a fall migrant September to April, but possible in winter and spring; the most regular migrant dabbling duck on the lower river, but other species occur irregularly

Ring-necked Duck- October to April; occasionally on the river itself, but more regular on the San Lorenzo Park pond; numbers usually small

Greater Scaup-uncommon in winter, mostly October to February

Lesser Scaup- uncommon in winter, mostly October to February

Bufflehead-common to almost abundant in winter, mostly October to April

Common Goldeneye- fairly common in winter, mostly November to late March

Hooded Merganser- uncommon migrant and winter visitor, possible mostly October to March

Ruddy Duck- uncommon migrant and winter visitor, possible mostly October to March

Red-throated Loon- occasionally fishes on the lower river, mostly October to April, but a few late or summering records

Pacific Loon- rather rare on the lower river, mostly September-May

Common Loon- October to May, uncommonly noted on the lower river

Horned Grebe- mostly from Soquel Ave. downstream, mostly October to March

Eared Grebe- regular mostly from September to March

Western Grebe- mostly downstream of Broadway, October-March

Clark's Grebe- mostly downstream of Broadway, October-March

Pelagic Cormorant- resident along the coast, but occasionally individuals will go upstream as far as Soquel Ave. or beyond

Turkey Vulture- uncommon and irregular, possible at any season, but mostly in migration

Sharp-shinned Hawk- uncommon, mostly September to May, but occasionally in other months

Spotted Sandpiper- regular August to early May, on muddy or grassy edges and along the rocky bluff near the mouth; some nesting records on the San Lorenzo, but none recent

Greater Yellowlegs- fairly common migrant, and uncommon in winter- mostly October to May, but fall migrants possible as early as July

Least Sandpiper- mostly a migrant, rare in winter; July to May

Western Sandpiper- uncommon spring and fall migrant

Short-billed Dowitcher- uncommon spring and fall migrant

Long-billed Dowitcher- uncommon spring and fall migrant

Wilson's Snipe- rather uncommon but regular in winter, mostly upstream of Soquel, along vegetated banks and islands; most recent records October-February, but migrants are possible earlier and later

Bonaparte's Gull- mostly a migrant (April and May, and less common November-early December), but possible in winter and rarely in summer; less common than formerly

Heerman's Gull- mostly a beach species (where often abundant), but a few irregularly go up-river to about Soquel Ave; mostly June to February (nests mostly in Mexico), but possible all year

Mew Gull- common, mostly October to April; can be quite numerous around Soquel Avenue and San Lorenzo Park

Ring-billed Gull-fairly common, mostly staying close to the mouth/beach area; mostly October to April, but occasional summering non-breeders

Herring Gull- fairly common, mostly October to early May

Thayer's Gull- uncommon but regular in "gull spots" along the river, mostly late-October to late April

Glaucous-winged Gull- fairly common, mostly October to May, but a few non-breeders have summered.

Vaux's Swift- Sometimes seen foraging with swallows along the river, mostly April-September; migrant and visitor from nearby nesting areas. This species seems to be declining in the area.

Northern Flicker- mostly a rather uncommon winter visitor from October to March, but possible outside of this time span. Some nest locally in hills nearby.

House Wren- uncommon to fairly common migrant and winter visitor, mostly August to February, with a few later migrants

Marsh Wren- winter resident in marsh habitat along the river, mostly September to March; while there is possible nesting habitat along this stretch of the river, and some nest nearby, there is no evidence of any nesting or even breeding season presence in this area

Ruby-crowned Kinglet- common winter resident, mostly late September-April

Hermit Thrush-uncommon to rather common winter resident (numbers vary), mostly in trees and shrubs, mostly early October to early April

American Pipit-most common as a fall migrant, but a few winter, present September to December, and occasionally noted later

Cedar Waxwing- possible early-September to the first few days of June, but usually most numerous in April and May, when the species can be abundant

Orange-crowned Warbler- uncommon winter, rather common migrant, and also possible as a post-breeding dispersant (nests commonly in nearby hills)

Yellow-rumped Warbler- common winter resident (September-April); both the "Audubon's" and the "Myrtle" forms are regular

Townsend's Warbler- winter resident, most in areas with larger or thicker trees, fairly common, but becoming more common upstream of Hwy 1

Savannah Sparrow- mostly a migrant (especially September) in open grassy areas, more common along the lower part of the river; usually uncommon

Lincoln's Sparrow- rather common winter resident, mostly mid-September-April

White-crowned Sparrow-abundant winter resident, mostly late-September-April

Golden-crowned Sparrow-common winter resident, mostly late-September-April

Western Tanager- mostly a migrant (uncommon to fairly common) in various trees near the river, most common in May and August/September but possible at other times

Pine Siskin- a wandering and irruptive species, irregularly present, and common some years, but rare or absent others, using deciduous and coniferous tree seeds and sometimes weeds (or feeders) along or near the river, mostly October to March, but possible in other months

American Goldfinch- though this species nests nearby (west Santa Cruz coast, etc.), there is no evidence of breeding or even regular presence in the breeding season. But non-breeders (probably many of them migrants from the north) are common in the weeds and willows along the river much of the year, mostly September to late April.