

# The Site Guide

## Monterey Peninsula, California and Adjacent Ocean

**Location** Monterey County, central California

**Description** A geographically varied region consisting of open ocean, sheltered waters, rugged surf-swept coastline, sand dunes, pine forest, redwood canyons, oak woodland, grassland, chaparral. It is bounded on the south by the rough Santa Lucia Mountains, the Ventana Wilderness Area of Los Padres Nat'l Forest; on the east by the fertile and extensively cultivated Salinas Valley and on the north, low lying coastal dunes; and on the west by the Pacific Ocean.

The area enjoys a benign climate, conducive to year-round, outdoor activity. Most precipitation occurs November - April.

Write in advance for a copy of the annotated *List of Birds of the Monterey Peninsula Region* (\$0.25) to the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, Forest Ave., Pacific Grove, Calif. 93950. For detailed road maps of the area write to the Monterey Peninsula Chamber of Commerce, 2030 Fremont Street, Monterey or to the AAA California State Automobile Association, 53 Soledad Drive, Monterey, Calif. 93940.

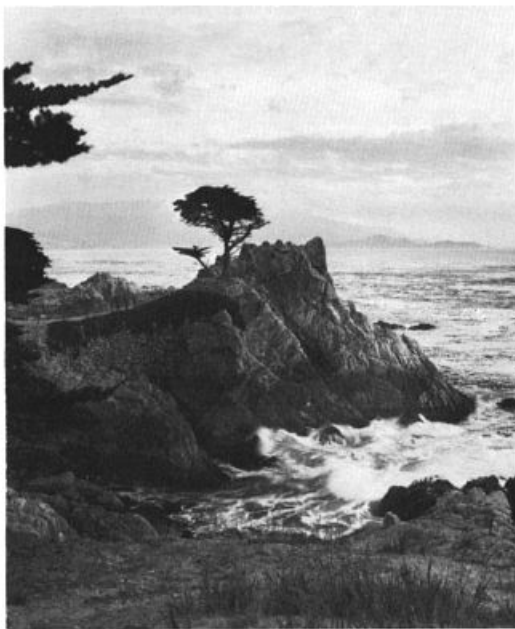
**Access** The Monterey Peninsula Airport is connected by frequent flights to San Francisco and Santa Barbara/Los Angeles. Car rentals are available at airport. The Peninsula is approximately 120 miles from San Francisco and 320 miles from Los Angeles, either by U.S. Hwy 101 or the more scenic State Hwy. 1.

**Accommodations** There are numerous motels and good restaurants in Carmel, Monterey and Pacific Grove. Advance reservations are not normally required, but may be advisable. Camping facilities are sparse in the immediate area but include sites in Veteran's Memorial Park, Monterey and Riverside Park, in Carmel Valley. Campgrounds are more numerous in the adjacent Los Padres Nat'l Forest and on the coast in the Big Sur area.

**Birdwatching** Rather than attempting to plot a single route, a description of variety of

different prime habitats, and what they might be expected to yield ornithologically follows

The open ocean around Monterey Bay is famous for the extensive variety and numbers of north Pacific marine birds. Oceanic conditions occur close to shore, with the 500 fathom line less than 10 miles from Pt. Pinos Spring and early summer upwelling of enriched cold waters result in an abundance of zooplankton and small schooling fishes in the fall. Under normal circumstances the best course for a pelagic birding boat to follow is due west from Pt. Pinos, 10-12 miles, then north towards Santa Cruz, then due east over the north rim of the immense Monterey Submarine Canyon until approximately 6 miles off Moss Landing, finally heading back towards the Peninsula. August through October is the period of greatest avian variety. Northern Fulmar, Flesh-footed, New Zealand and Sooty Shearwaters, Ashy and Black Petrels, Red and Northern Phalaropes, Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers, Sabine's Gull, Arctic Tern, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot and Cassin's Auklet are all common to abundant. Black-footed Albatross is more common from January through July, than August through December. In addition



*C. Midway Pt., Pebble Beach, looking across Carmel Bay to Pt. Lobos State Reserve and Santa Lucia Mts beyond. Foraging area for Brandt's Cormorant, smaller grebes, phalaropes, sea otters. Endemic Monterey Cypress, foreground. Photo| Monterey Pen. Chamber of Commerce.*

Manx Shearwater, Fork-tailed, Leach's and Wilson's Storm-Petrels, Skua, Xantus' Murrelet and Tufted Puffin may, with luck be observed August through October. (For details for guided fall boat trips available to reach the offshore feeding grounds of these species, write: Field Trips, Golden Gate Audubon Society, 2642 Russell St., Berkeley, Calif. 94705, or California Field Ornithologists, P.O. Box 369, Del Mar, Calif. 92014. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Early reservations are essential). In addition, sport fishing boats leave Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey year round, daily about 7:30 a.m., and serve as good platforms for observing sea birds. It is wise to ascertain from the skipper beforehand what type of fishing is anticipated and how far from shore he expects to go.

During the winter months, N. Fulmar, Black-legged Kittiwake and Ancient Murrelet are more numerous and Rhinoceros Auklets are abundant and can be seen from shore late December through early March. The Slender-billed Shearwater is a rare winter visitor.

Those unable to join a boat need not feel deprived because exceptionally good observation of pelagics is possible, especially with a good spotting scope, from outer headlands such as Pt. Pinos in Pacific Grove and Cypress Pt. in Pebble Beach. Cypress Pt. is an excellent site in late April and early May and Pt. Pinos in late October through November. Migrations of loons, Black Brant, scoter and other sea ducks, Northern Phalaropes and other shorebirds, gulls and terns can be viewed during this period.

The sheltered coastal waters of Monterey and Carmel Bays are wintering places for numerous loons, grebes cormorants, sea ducks, gulls and alcids and may be viewed with great ease in the vicinity of Monterey Harbor. There the Coast Guard breakwater and Municipal Wharf (not Fisherman's Wharf) are excellent elevated vantage points. Note that Arctic Loons far outnumber the two other species, although they often feed further out in deep water. Yellow-billed Loons have been sighted for several successive winters. Continued observation of this inshore species should be possible from a little greater distance, with the essential scope. Excellent sites are off nearby Cannery Row in Monterey and Ocean View Blvd. in Pacific Grove, especially in the vicinity of Lover's Pt. and Otter Pt. The latter site features another Peninsula speciality, the sea otter.



*B. Sheltered waters at Lovers' Pt., Pacific Grove. Loons grebes, sea ducks and Black Turnstone found here Photo/Pacific Grove Chamber of Commerce.*

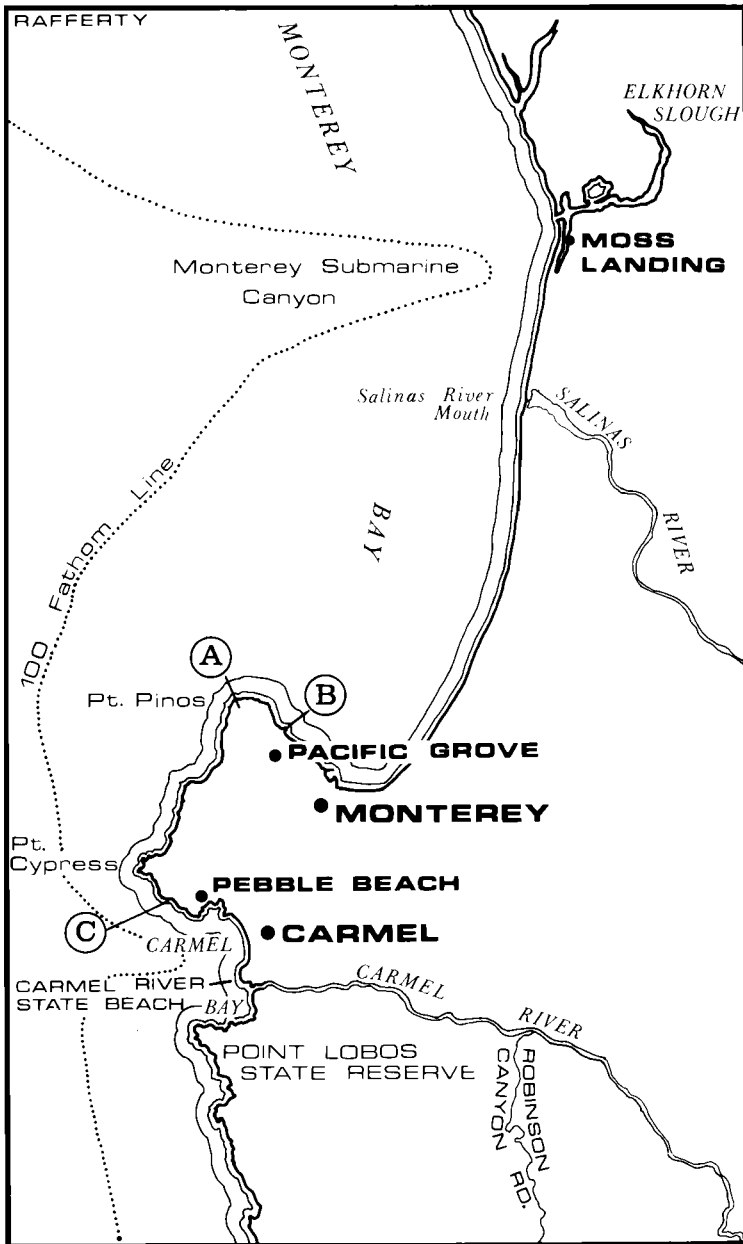
From August through October, a marked northward post-breeding dispersal brings large numbers of Brown Pelicans, Heermann's Gulls and Elegant Terns to inshore waters. The last species is often seen being pursued by Parasitic or Pomarine Jaegers.

The Peninsula shoreline itself is mostly rocky, broken by small sand beaches. Pt. Pinos is the richest and most accessible rocky area. Here from August through April Black Turnstones are abundant with Ruddy comparatively scarce. The Surfbird is then common and Wandering Tattler a common migrant, with a few wintering. At least one Rock Sandpiper occurs there each winter. Black Oystercatchers are present in twos or threes, and, if not found at Pt. Pinos, then may be found along the south shore of Pt. Lobos State Reserve (7 miles south of Monterey on Hwy.1). The Reserve is also famous for the close approach it affords the birder to nesting Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorant, Western Gull and Pigeon Guillemot in the vicinity of Sea Lion Pt. and Bird Island.

Sand beaches, especially Asilomar and Carmel River State Beach, are frequented by Snowy and Black-bellied Plover, Whimbrel, Willet, Baird's Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit and Sanderling. Kelp beds near Pt. Pinos should be examined in October and November for Red Phalaropes, which are sometimes present in the thousands.

Carmel River State Beach provides the only estuarine habitat on the Peninsula.

The Peninsula is remarkable in the autumn for occurrences of "eastern vagrants", i.e. those species, especially warblers, breeding east of the Continental Divide, normally considered only stragglers to the Pacific coast. At least 20 species of eastern warblers have been identified in recent years, mostly in the



cypress trees around Crespi Pond at Pt. Pinos and Esplanade Ave., and pines in and around the cemetery, all in Pacific Grove. The riparian growth along the lower Carmel River seems similarly attractive to these vagrants. The peak period for such observations is mid-September through mid-October. Eastern vagrants have not been observed here in the spring, with a few sporadic exceptions.

Much of the Peninsula is covered by a forest of Monterey Pine, where Steller's Jay, Pygmy

Nuthatch and Chestnut-backed Chickadee abound, and are joined in summer by Olive-sided and Western Flycatcher. Irregularly wandering bands of Red Crossbill, Evening Grosbeak and Red-breasted Nuthatch occur. Winter brings abundant Yellow-rumped, Townsend's and a few Hermit Warblers

From October through April; where pine and oak mix Pygmy Owl, Band-tailed Pigeon, Scrub Jay, Acorn Woodpecker, Common Bushtit, Hutton's Vireo, Orange-crowned

Warbler and Golden-crowned Sparrow occur. These are readily observable in Washington Park in Pacific Grove and the forest trails of Pt. Lobos State Reserve and Jack's Peak County Park. This park is well known for its overwintering Monarch butterflies. Access is gained by turning right on Olmstead Rd. 1½ miles east of Hwy. 1, on Hwy. 68, Monterey-Salinas.

Riparian habitat is scarce in the area and located mainly along the Carmel River. One of the most accessible examples is between Hwy. 1 and the Carmel River State Beach. Park on the south side of Carmel River Bridge on Hwy 1 and walk west on a narrow road along the south bank of the river to a sewer plant. In summer one can walk along the riverbed itself. Another is in the vicinity of the Robinson Canyon Rd. Bridge over the Carmel River. This is reached by driving east 6 miles on Carmel Valley Rd. from Hwy. 1. One more is east of Carmel Valley Village. Among the species found are Red-shouldered Hawk, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, Western Wood Pewee, Warbling Vireo, Orange-crowned, Yellow and Wilson's Warblers and Black-headed Grosbeak.

Although typical California chaparral is found on the Peninsula, the further east one goes, away from the cooling effects of the coastal climate, the better the chaparral birding becomes. One of the most accessible examples is on the north side of the Carmel Valley penetrated by Tierra Grande Drive. Proceed east from Hwy. 1 on Carmel Valley Rd. 5.75 miles, turning left up incline. Exploration of back roads in this area may turn up Roadrunner, Poor-will, Allen's Hummingbird, White-throated Swift, Wren-tit, California Thrasher, Lesser Goldfinch, Brown Towhee, Rufous-crowned and Sage Sparrows, and the rare Black-chinned Sparrow. This is an area best explored at dawn.

Oak woodland, redwood canyon and interior grassland habitats are typical of interior valleys of central California, away from the coast. The finest example, close to the Peninsula, is enhanced by its scenic beauty. Robinson Canyon is a tributary valley cut in the south flank of Carmel Valley. It is reached by proceeding east on Carmel Valley Rd. 6 miles from Hwy. 1 turning south across the river on Robinson Canyon Rd., then proceeding for 9 miles. The valley is threaded by a narrow road which twists its way up through coastal redwood groves, oak forest, then out onto oak-studded grasslands successively.



A. Crespi Pond and Golf Course at Pt. Pinos. Emergent vegetation holds Sora and Virginia Rails (Aug.-Mar.) Cypress Grove trees shelter many rare "eastern" vagrants (Sept.-Oct.). Photo/Pacific Grove Chamber of Commerce.

Birds to look for in the redwoods are Steller's Jay, Pygmy and Saw-whet Owls, Varied Thrush (winter), Winter Wren, and Pine Siskin. The oak forest should contain Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Scrub Jay, Swainson's Thrush, Solitary Vireo, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Lazuli Bunting, "Bullock's" Oriole, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Chipping Sparrow. The birds of oak motte grasslands, include Turkey Vulture, White-tailed Kite, Golden Eagle, Sparrow Hawk, Western Kingbird, Say's Phoebe (winter), Yellow-billed Magpie, Western Bluebird, and Lark Sparrow.

Beyond the Peninsula, but within easy reach are: Big Sur (Black Swift, Dipper); Elkhorn Slough and Salinas River mouth (shorebirds, nesting terns etc.); Chew's Ridge (Mountain Quail, Flammulated and Spotted Owls, Western Tanager and other high altitude species); Arroyo Seco (Phainopepla, Dipper, Black-chinned Hummingbird). The upper Carmel Valley and Chew's Ridge roads provide richer land birding in spring and summer than the Peninsula.

**Rating** Spring (April-May) ★★★ Summer (June-July) ★ Fall (Aug.-Oct.) ★★★★★ Winter (Nov.-Mar.) ★★★★★

I wish to thank Bill Reese for his suggestions.

—Alan Baldrige, School of Marine Science, 4600 Rickenbacker Causeway, Miami, Fla. 33149.