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Best California Beaches to View Migrating Birds

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California beaches attract more than just year-round tourists — they are also a common destination for many migrating birds and birding enthusiasts. Some species make the California coast their final stop; others rest here for a day or two before continuing on. Fall and spring offer opportunities to see birds passing through on their way further south or back home. However, the lack of beach-going crowds in the winter months can make December, January, and February prime time for birders, with some beaches providing habitats for more than 430 recorded bird species.



Depending on location, some of the more commonly seen birds are the golden-crowned sparrow, whimbrel, and varied thrush, along with native California species, like the California condor, common loon, Western grebe, and the Merlin falcon.

These are our top 10 beaches to catch a glimpse of migrating birds on the California coast, listed North to South (also check out our companion [migrating bird beach map](#)):

[Trinidad State Beach](#), Humboldt County

This picturesque beach is a short walk from the parking lot, keeping crowds at a minimum. Gray Jays, common murre, and Black Oystercatchers are just a few species that dwell here.

[Ten Mile Beach](#), Mendocino Coast

Home to the endangered Snowy Plover, Ten Mile Beach is connected to nearby [MacKerracker State Park Beach](#) by the Haul Road Trail and backed by a chain of pristine sand dunes. More than 90 species of birds live or visit the beach and nearby cliffs.

[Point Reyes National Seashore](#), Marin County

Just north of San Francisco, this state preserve is noted in many guidebooks for the fact that more than 400 species of birds have been noted here. The beaches here are natural and untouched, with amazing vistas of the rugged coastline.

[Cowell Ranch State Beach](#), San Mateo County

Consisting of two pocket beaches, Cowell Ranch State Beach is a secluded, peaceful destination for birding. Access to the northern beach is by a steep staircase. Just south of here is Seal Beach, a harbor seal protection area closed to visitors. If you don't want to hike down to the beach, you can follow the [Cowell-Purisima Trail](#), a segment of the California Coastal Trail, which begins at this location and follows the bluff all the way to another parking lot 3.6 miles away.

[Morro Strand Beach](#), San Luis Obispo County

Located at the north end of Morro Bay, Morro Strand State Beach is part of California's protected state beaches. The famous Morro Rock is visible from here, as well as a regular contingency of sea lions basking near the shore and many kinds of birds.

[Ormond Beach](#), Ventura County

More than 200 migratory bird species have been documented at this remote beach. Visitors can follow a trail through the wetlands leading to the beach. The Ormond shoreline and wetlands provide homes for more shorebirds than any other beach in Ventura County.

[El Matador State Beach](#), Malibu

This small beach surrounded by rock formations is reached by descending a series of staircases. The scenery here is breathtaking, and migrating shorebirds make good use of the relative quiet of the beach.

[Playa del Rey Beach](#), Los Angeles

Just south of Santa Monica, this easily overlooked beach sits just west of the protected Ballona Wetlands Nature Preserve. Bird species are plentiful here and the beach is rarely crowded.

[Bolsa Chica State Beach](#), Orange County

This beach is located near the Bolsa Chica Conservation Area, which attracts numerous birders trying to spot its more than 300 bird species. It is a known stop on the Pacific Flyway, the route many birds take to and from Central and South America during migration.

[San Onofre State Beach](#), San Diego County

A tidal wetland combined with native vegetation creates a perfect habitat for many migratory and native bird species. Drawing surfers, beachcombers and birders alike, this protected beach is popular year round.

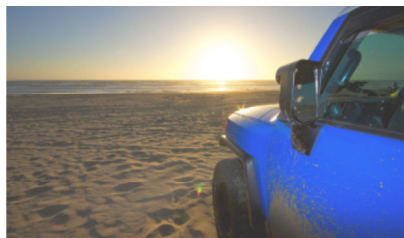
For more options, check out our complete list of [birdwatching beaches](#).

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Trinidad State Beach spans a wide space between Elk Head on the north end and Trinidad Head on the south end in the Humboldt County town of Trinidad. Pewetole Island, [...]

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[Ten Mile Beach](#)

Ten Mile Beach is the long stretch of coastline at Inglenook Fen Ten Mile Dunes Preserve in MacKerricher State Park. The beach, which is actually about four miles long, starts [...]

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[MacKerricher State Park – Main Beach](#)

Main Beach is the beach closest to the main entrance and campgrounds in MacKerricher State Park north of Fort Bragg. It's a dark sand beach that is about a mile [...]

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MacKerricher State Park – Laguna Point

The Seal Watching Station on Laguna Point in MacKerricher State Park has several viewing platforms for seal and whale watching during their appropriate seasons. These vantage points are worth the effort just [...]

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Point Reyes North Beach

North Beach at Point Reyes Beach is the northern access point to an 11-mile long beach on the west side of Point Reyes National Seashore. Beachcombing is probably the biggest [...]

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Point Reyes South Beach

South Beach is the southern access to Point Reyes Beach, an 11-mile long strand nicknamed “The Great Beach” in Point Reyes National Seashore. This vast expanse of shoreline is excellent for beachcombing. Walk [...]

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Cowell Ranch Beach

Cowell Ranch Beach south of Half Moon Bay is a public beach that was protected in 1987 by Peninsula Open Space Trust and the California Coastal Conservancy. Soon after the [...]

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Cowell-Purisima Trail

The Cowell-Purisima Trail is a 3.6 mile long public hiking and cycling trail along the high bluffs south of Half Moon Bay. It's part of the cross-state hiking and biking [...]

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Morro Strand State Beach

Morro Strand State Beach is divided into two parts that are in the cities of Morro Bay and Cayucos. The main southern portion of this state park is in Morro [...]

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Ormond Beach

Ormond Beach is the beach fronting the Ormond Wetlands and some farmlands near Oxnard in Ventura County. Ormond Beach fills a two mile gap between the city of Port Hueneme [...]

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El Matador State Beach

El Matador Beach is one of three beaches within Robert H. Meyer Memorial State Beach. El Matador is the most popular of the three and the closest to Malibu. The [...]

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Playa Del Rey Beach

Playa Del Rey Beach is the wide sandy beach in front of the Playa Del Rey neighborhood of Los Angeles. The beach is northwest of LAX Airport on state land [...]

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Bolsa Chica State Beach

Bolsa Chica State Beach is a three mile long wide sandy beach in Huntington Beach, CA. It starts at Warner Avenue and extends south to Seapoint Avenue. North of Warner [...]

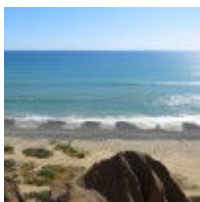
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San Onofre State Beach – Surf Beach (Old Man’s)

Old Man’s Beach at San Onofre State Beach (officially called “Surf Beach” by the park) is located north of Oceanside in northern San Diego County. The specific location of Old [...]

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[San Onofre State Beach – Bluffs Beaches](#)

San Onofre State Beach is located between Oceanside and San Clemente, CA. The main area of the park which is called “Bluffs” has a long continuous parking lot along the [...]

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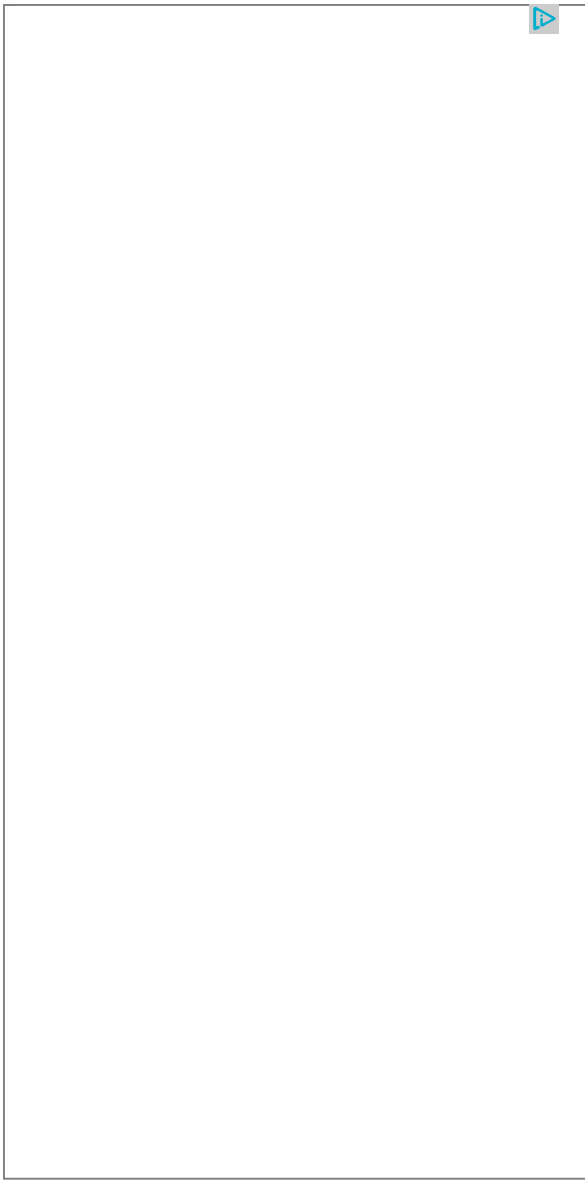
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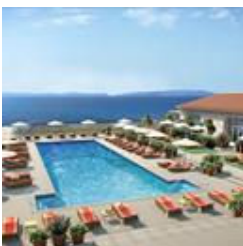


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