



**BATIQUITOS LAGOON  
FOUNDATION**

# BIRDS

---

## Major Groups at Batiquitos

Many different types of birds are found at Batiquitos Lagoon, and the overall bird population shifts dramatically with the seasons: over 180 species have been recorded at Batiquitos Lagoon at different times of year. This varied population can be grouped in various ways. Based mostly on feeding behaviors, the commonly seen birds using the various wetland habitats of Batiquitos Lagoon can be divided into five groups (or guilds):

- **swimming divers** (grebes, diving ducks, and others)
- **surface swimmers** (dabbling ducks)
- **flight feeders** (terns, skimmers, and others)
- **walkers/runners** (plovers and most sandpipers)
- **waders/fishers** (herons, egrets, and others)

In addition, there are other birds found in the marsh areas (especially for breeding) and the lagoon surroundings.

**Swimming divers** – These are the birds that generally swim in deep water so that they can dive for fish, aquatic invertebrates, or submerged vegetation. Ruddy Ducks, several species of grebes, and Brown Pelicans are present year-round but are more common during the winter wet season. Buffleheads, Lesser Scaup, Redheads, and Canvasback are common during winter. This group is most abundant in the central basin and the central channel of the east basin. Double-crested Cormorants are also in this group, but since they use the lagoon mostly for resting, they are not a significant component of the lagoon feeding avifauna. Loons are oceanic birds diving and making use of the lagoon's marine habitat.



**Surface swimmers** – These "dabblers" feed near the surface and are located in many parts of the lagoon: in open water, using shallow water to feed and deeper water for resting; in shallow water along the shoreline for both feeding and resting; on water-saturated mud flats; or in pickleweed or cattail marshes. There can be hundreds of dabbling ducks on the lagoon during winter. The most abundant dabbling duck species are Mallards, Northern Shovelers, Northern Pintail, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, and American Wigeon. In winter, dabbling ducks can be found most often in areas of shallow water when the lagoon is flooded.





**Flight feeders** – Most of these birds (terns and skimmers) forage over deep water and rest on mud flats, sand spits, nonvegetated or sparsely vegetated islands, or other resting spots such as posts in the water. Terns, which plunge into the water from moderate to high altitudes, are so-called plunge divers (as are Osprey), while Black Skimmers are surface skimmers. Most terns, as well as the Skimmers, are generally present only in spring, summer, and fall, although Forster's Terns remain throughout the winter, too. Some gulls are in this group but use the lagoon mostly for resting. Gulls are more common in winter but summering (nonbreeding) individuals are present. Phoebes are flight feeders, too, catching insects in a process called aerial hawking.



**Walkers/runners** – These are the birds which search for food as they walk or run either across mud or sand flats (exposed or under a few inches of water) or through shallow water. The shorebirds include many kinds of sandpipers (Western and Least Sandpipers, Willets, Long-billed Curlews, Marbled Godwits, and others), several kinds of plovers, Black-legged Stilts, and American Avocets. Sandpipers are the most abundant bird group in late summer and fall when many visit the lagoon on their southward migration after breeding in the Arctic, many staying for the whole nonbreeding season. The most abundant are the Western Sandpipers, often numbering in the thousands. Other birds in this group are found year-round: the most common being the Stilts, Avocets, and Killdeer, a species of plover. Shorebirds are found on recently exposed mud flats where the mud is soft and rich supplies of food are available.



**Waders/fishers** – The most common species within this group are the herons: Great Egret, Snowy Egret, and Great Blue Heron. These patient fishermen are not particularly abundant because, although they are highly visible, they are usually alone and not present in great numbers. They can be found year-round, especially at the east end. Herons and ibises, also sandpipers called dowitchers, are nearly always found near the water's edge: in shallow water along the shoreline, on saturated mud flats, or in east basin brackish marshes when the lagoon is flooded and the mud flats are inundated. Dowitchers are seen in fall, winter, and spring.

**Others** - Other birds utilizing wetland habitats around the lagoon include rails in the freshwater reeds, Belding's Savannah Sparrows in the salt/pickleweed marsh, and Song Sparrows and Common Yellowthroats (year-round), as well as Red-tailed Hawks and White-crowned Sparrows (in winter) in the uplands. Before the lagoon became more salty, American Coots were the most commonly seen birds because they have several different feeding modes: surface dipping, surface diving, and ground gleaning.