

Trail Guide - Self Guided

Signpost 1 - Marsh View

The cattails near the water are a result of freshwater runoff: they cannot tolerate saltwater. This is a favorite nesting site of the Red-winged Blackbird.

Signpost 2 - Coastal Goldenbush

This native plant is found in the disturbed areas in many places just to either side of the trail. It has yellow flowers from mid-summer to fall, then dandelion-like seeds in the winter. Thus, these plants serve as a source of food for birds when other plants are dormant.

Signpost 3 - West View

Look across the lagoon to the 3 bridges (freeway, railroad, and coast highway) that restrict the flow of water to the lagoon from the ocean. Swallows, important in reducing flying insect populations, build their mud nests on the freeway bridge, and in the spring and summer, the air is filled with swallows feeding on insects.

Signpost 4 - Cactus

Prickly pear cactus tolerates low rainfall. Its pads, fruit, and seeds were an important food source for Native Americans.

This cactus is a favorite site for a garden spider called the Silver Argiope. It is often a host for the cochineal scale, a small insect that at one time was a major source for an edible red dye.



Signpost 5 - Nesting Site

Across the lagoon, you will see one of the five man-made sand nesting sites created for the California Least Tern and western Snowy Plover, both endangered species of birds. For nesting, Least Terns require an open sandy area with shells and pebbles to provide camouflage for their eggs.

Signpost 6 - Geology

The exposed sandstone cliffs along the trail are known as the Eocene Scripps Formation. This white or light brown sandstone was deposited in a shallow ocean approximately 50 million years ago. Batiquitos Lagoon was created when the water that had been frozen in glaciers during the ice age melted, raising the sea level by about 400 feet and flooding a deep canyon. Look behind you and across the lagoon to see a more recent orange layer, estimated to be about 190,000 years old, laid on top of the gray sandstone. The exposed rock face above the “Park-and-Ride” shows an offset in the layers of rock.

Signpost 7- Lagoon Birds

Birds that use the lagoon for foraging and nesting habitat can be categorized as waders/fishers, walkers/runners, flight feeders, surface swimmers, or swimming divers.

Three species of large wading birds (Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, and Snowy Egret) are seen throughout the year stalking fish in the shallows of the lagoon. Another wader is the American Avocet with its striking white and black body and gray (in winter) or cinnamon (in summer: the breeding season) head.

During the winter, the quick-moving Killdeer and small shorebirds can be seen walking or running on the mudflats and beaches.



The flight feeders birds include a number of species of terns. Terns, usually white with black caps, can be seen hovering and then plunging for fish. The endangered California Least Tern is resident only in the late spring and summer.

Common waterfowl (remaining categories: swimming divers and surface swimmers) include ducks like Mallards (identified by the drake’s iridescent green head and white neck ring) and Green-winged Teal (with emerald green flashes in their wings).

Signpost 8 - Shell Fragments

You will notice a large number of shell fragments on the ground; this identifies a **midden**: a spot used by local Native Americans as a refuse dump for shellfish shells. Archeologists have found nearly 200 prehistoric sites within a mile of the lagoon. **DO NOT DIG OR REMOVE SHELLS**—remember it is an ecological preserve!

Signpost 9 - Castor Bean

This introduced and invasive plant has been removed from near the trail here and further back on the other side of the trail. However, there are other examples down the trail to the left. These large plants, with shiny leaves and clumps of fruits (enclosing the beans), have adapted very well to this area. Even though there are some commercial and medicinal uses of the plant, all parts are **very** poisonous.

Signpost 10 - Coastal Sage Scrub

The native plant community on the hillside around the lagoon is **coastal sage scrub**. The major plant in the community is California sagebrush, identified by its feathery, gray-green foliage and sagelike aroma. Coastal sage scrub is the habitat of the threatened Calif. Gnatcatcher.

Signpost 11 - Riparian Habitat

This area is an often wet, low-lying drainage basin which had produced many plants such as native arroyo willow and coyote bush and non-native watercress, fennel (anise), invasive arundo reeds, wild mustard, and wild radish. The palm tree was planted.

Signpost 12 - Eucalyptus

These eucalyptus trees are native to Australia and have naturalized in California, invading native plant habitats. The leaves and seed pods that fall beneath the trees contain pungent oils that prevent other plants, including native coastal sage scrub, from growing underneath. Many trees here have lost their leaves because of an insect pest, the red gum lerp psyllid.

Signpost 13 - Mudflat Ecology

As the tide goes out, the lagoon’s mudflats are exposed. These mudflats may look barren to the eye, but below the surface, this habitat is where to a wide assortment of invertebrates (animals without backbones) live. These animals can tolerate the physiological stress caused by changes in water level, temperature, and salinity within the lagoon system. The most abundant species are worms and clams. Other invertebrates include small snails and

shrimp. All can be food for birds and other animals and are part of an intricate food web.

Signpost 14 - Mojave Yucca

The Mojave Yucca up the steep hill is an example of the kind of plant that was highly regarded by early Native Americans because they could eat the fruit and also use the strong fibers for ropes and weaving and the roots for soap. Its only pollinator is a small white moth.

Signpost 15 - Coastal Saltmarsh

Between the trail and the water's edge is an example of a southern coastal saltmarsh community. The dominant salt-tolerant plant found at the lagoon is pickleweed. Native Americans valued the seeds as a food, and early settlers ate the foliage and likened it to pickles. The plant has a high alkaline salt content so it has been used for making soap and glass.



Pickleweed is easily identified by its fleshy leaves which look like a string of pickles. The dense low growth provides nesting habitat for the endangered Belding's Savannah Sparrow.

Signpost 16 - Lagoon Fishes

The lagoon serves as a breeding and nursery area for a wide variety of coastal fishes. Tidal creeks and channels provide surge-free refuges for small fishes and for the eggs and larvae of larger fishes. The places with sandy bottoms provide habitat for rays, sharks, and flatfishes. Submerged vegetation such as eelgrass shelters the staghorn sculpin

and the pipefish and goby families. Shallow water species include the halibut, turbot, sardines, and croakers. Open water species include mullet, bass, anchovies, sardines and top smelt.

Signpost 17 - Lemonadeberry

This bush is a drought-resistant plant. Feel the leaves, which are thick and waxy to resist dehydration during the hot, dry summer months. The ripe red berries are coated with a sticky sweet substance that, when stirred into water, makes a refreshing lemonade-like drink.

Signpost 18 - Wildlife

Steep hillsides offer habitats for rabbits and ground squirrels so that they can set up their extensive warrens. Look for tracks along the path: most common are dogs, but you might spot raccoon or coyote tracks.

Batiquitos Lagoon Foundation

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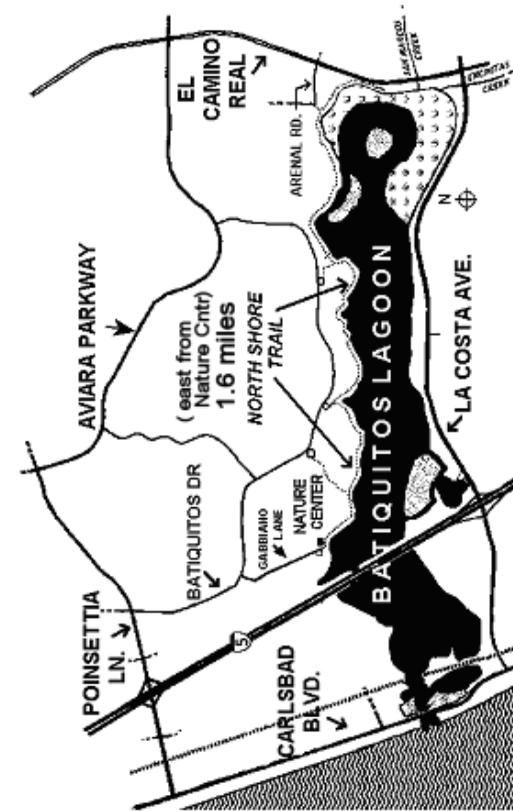
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Preserve, Protect, and Enhance Batiquitos Lagoon



Find out more about what happens at the lagoon by becoming a member and/or volunteering.

Batiquitos Lagoon Foundation



Interpretive Trail Guide

The California Department of Fish and Game manages the Lagoon as an Ecological Reserve. Ecological Reserves are established to provide protection for plants and animals and their habitats, especially those that are threatened or endangered. **Do not disturb the things that you find here!!**