

Muir Beach

Native Birds Survey

May 1994 to April 1995

Prepared For

The Golden Gate National Recreation
Area

U. S. National Park Service

Prepared By

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Methods

Birds at Big Lagoon were censused on twelve dates (one census per month for one year) spanning the period from May 1994 to April 1995 by Stallcup, often joined by other competent field ornithologists. On each visit, all birds present in the area were identified (visually or audibly) and counted. All were assigned to the habitat in which they occurred. In cases where a species was recorded in more than one habitat, that in which it was most frequently detected is given first in the annotated list.

Dates

<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>
12 May	16 January
11 June	20 February
11 July	19 March
29 August	11 April
27 September	
1 October	
15 November	
5 December	

In addition to the present surveys, data compiled from the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Census (CBC 1978-1992: at Muir Beach, most years by Stallcup's team) were used as were observations incidental to the study by Gordon Bennett, Keith Hansen, Dianne Sierra, and Rich Stallcup.

Results

One hundred eighty-five species of birds were identified during the current survey within (or on the edges of) the census area (see map). This high number is not a surprise given the varied habitats and year-around observation. It does, however, contain eighty-five species additional to the previous analysis (Philip Williams & Associates, Ltd., Pier 35, The Embarcadero, San Francisco, CA 94133).

Of these species, three (Rock Dove, European Starling and House Sparrow) are not native to North America. Forty-five species were documented as breeders in the Muir Beach area and six others were noted as probable breeders. Twelve species listed are of accidental occurrence - they are not likely to be found here again.

Riparian (Willow and Alder forests) habitats were clearly the most thoroughly used by the Muir Beach Avifauna at all seasons. In winter and during migration, several flocks of mixed-species

insectivores are present. On special, spring mornings, the riparian woods are alive with the songs of recently returned tropical migrants. Five male Swainson's Thrushes, five Pacific Slope Flycatchers, eight Wilson's and three Orange-crowed Warblers retained territories in the riparian in May of 1994 and/or spring of 1995. Many other species nest there in smaller numbers.

The presence of large numbers of unrestrained dogs on the beach keep shorebird numbers unusually low.

LEGEND

Seasonality

W = Winter - mostly winter also late fall and spring migrant
S = Summer - mostly summer also early fall and spring migrant
M = Migrant - passing migrant - many of these nest nearby
P = Permanent Resident - present all year

Habitat

A = Aerial - flying above
B = Beach
C = Cove - foraging cove to 200 meters off Muir Beach
O = Rocks - offshore rocks or headland cliffs
F = Freshwater Marsh
H = Horse pasture and fences
R = Riparian - Willow and Alder forests
G = Gardens - Town edge of census area including Pines /
U = Upland - Dry, weedy areas, *Atriplex* etc.

Status

Abundance status is generally addressed below each species in the annotated list of birds.

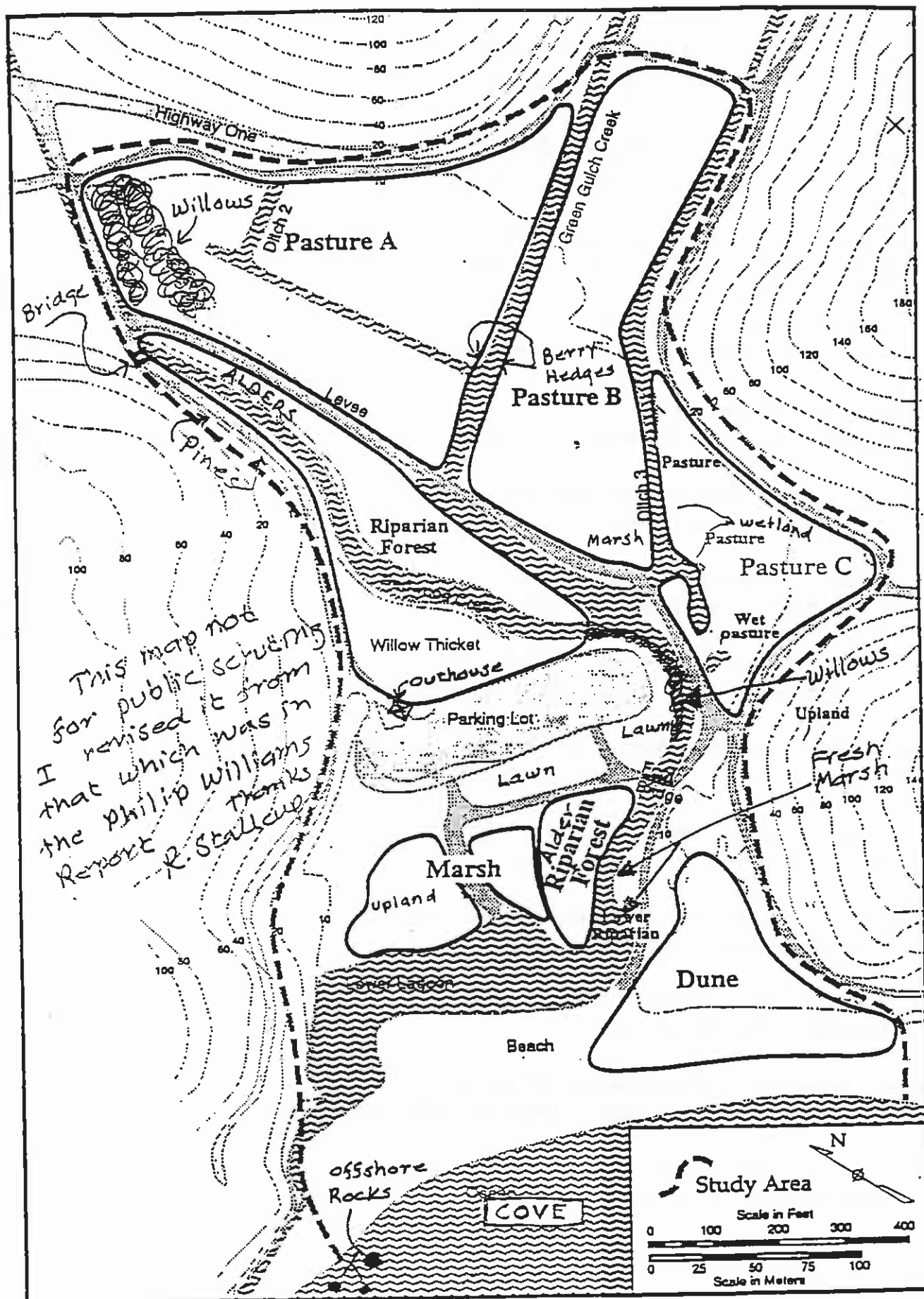


Figure
III-6

Vegetation types at Big Lagoon.

**Annotated List of
The Birds
of
Muir Beach
Marin County, California**

- Red-throated Loon - *Gavia stellata* - W;C
Observed on 5 of 12 visits - maximum = 5
- Pacific Loon - *Gavia pacifica* - W;C
Observed on 3 of 12 visits - maximum = 2
- Common Loon - *Gavia immer* - W;C
Observed on 7 of 12 visits - maximum = 3
- Pied-billed Grebe - *Podilymbus podiceps* - W;F
Uncommon winter visitor
- Horned Grebe - *Podiceps auritus* - W;C
Observed on 4 of 12 visits - maximum = 2
- Eared Grebe - *Podiceps nigricollis* - W;C
Observed on 4 of 12 visits - maximum = 7
- Western Grebe - *Aechmophorus occidentalis* - W;C
Observed on 9 of 12 visits - maximum = 20
- Clark's Grebe - *Aechmophorus clarkii* - W;C
Observed on 6 of 12 visits - maximum = 3
- Double-crested Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax auritus* - P;C,O,A
Common winter, uncommon summer
- Brandt's Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax penicillatus* - P;C,O
Common offshore all year
- *Pelagic Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* - P;C,O
Common offshore all year - nests at cliffs above cove
- Brown Pelican - *Pelecanus occidentalis* - P;C,O
Most frequent in summer and fall May to October

Great Blue Heron - *Ardea herodias* - P;F,H

Occasional visitor - most are promptly chased away by dogs

Great Egret - *Casmerodius albus* - P;F,H

Occasional visitor - most are promptly chased away by dogs

Snowy Egret - *Egretta thula* - W;F

Occasional winter visitor

Cattle Egret - *Bubulcus ibis* - W;H

One CBC record of one individual (extremely rare)

Green Heron - *Butorides striatus* - S;F,R

One CBC and one spring (4/11/95) records: riparian habitat adequate for nesting

Black-crowned Night Heron - *Nycticorax nycticorax* - W;R

Day roost in willow riparian - max = 4

Canada Goose - *Branta canadensis* - W;F,H

Occasional winter visitors - only *B. c. moffitti* seen. Feral or natural status unknown

Wood Duck - *Aix sponsa* - W;R

One CBC record - a pair in the creek beneath Alders (RS)

Green-winged Teal - *Anas crecca* - W;F,H

Occasional in flooded fields

*Mallard - *Anas platyrhynchos* - W;F,H

Nests in marsh and flooded fields (13 chicks with one female 4/11/95), many winter visitors to flooded pasture

Northern Pintail - *Anas acuta* - W;F,H

Occasional visitor to flooded fields

Cinnamon Teal - *Anas cyanoptera* - W;F,H

A spring migrant from January through April

Northern Shoveler - *Anas clypeata* - W;F,H

Rare (two records) in flooded pastures

Gadwall - *Anas strepera* - W;F,H

Rare (two wintered 1994/1995) in flooded pastures

Eurasian Wigeon - *Anas penelope* - W;H

Rare - one CBC record of male with American Wigeon

American Wigeon - *Anas americana* - W;F,H

Common in flooded pasture - max = 124

Greater Scaup - *Aythya marila* - W;C

Rare, swimming in cove (one record November with LESC)

8 birds

Lesser Scaup - *Aythya affinis* - W;C

Rare, swimming in cove (one record November with GRSC)

1 bird

Surf Scoter - *Melanitta perspicillata* - W;C

Common - feeding or resting in cove

Common Goldeneye - *Bucephala clangula* - W;C

Occasionally seen in cove - foraging near rocks

Bufflehead - *Bucephala albeola* - W;C,H

Occasionally seen in cove

Red-breasted Merganser - *Mergus serrator* - W;C

Occasionally seen fishing in cove

Turkey Vulture - *Cathartes aura* - P;A

Frequently drifting overhead - once, 3 seen perched in conifer snag sticking out of riparian

Osprey - *Pandion haliaetus* - S;A

Occasionally foraging offshore - there are about 50 nesting pairs in Marin County

White-tailed Kite - *Elanus caeruleus* - M;A

Also, occasional winter and summer visitor to grasslands & pasture

Northern Harrier - *Circus cyaneus* - M;A

Also, occasional winter visitor

Sharp-shinned Hawk - *Accipiter striatus* - W;R,G

One to three hunt the area each winter - more frequent in fall migration

Cooper's Hawk - *Accipiter cooperii* - W;R,G

Occasionally one is seen in winter - more frequent during fall migration. Riparian habitat at Muir Beach is adequate for nesting

Red-shouldered Hawk - *Buteo lineatus* - P;R,G,H

Nests nearby. Often seen on fences of pasture

Red-tailed Hawk - *Buteo jamaicensis* - P;A

Nests nearby - occasionally seen on poles in pasture or drifting overhead

Ferruginous Hawk - *Buteo regalis* - W;A

One to two FEHAs forage grassy nearby hills. Occasionally one will sail above the Muir Beach area

American Kestrel - *Falco sparverius* - W;A,H

One male retained territory around the horse pastures all winter 94-95. This is the max number the area will allow

Merlin - *Falco columbarius* - W;A,H

This species is an occasional winter visitor. On 12/5/94 a female of the race *F. c. suckleyii* took a Varied Thrush on the wing over the riparian.

Peregrine Falcon - *Falco peregrinus* - W;A

Occasional visitor seen flying overhead. In the winter of 1992/93 Ted and Katie Elliot (local residents) found a dead Peregrine on Muir Beach. It was banded and had been hacked in San Luis Obispo County in 1990.

*California Quail - *Callipepla californica* - P;R,U,H

Always present in pasture and on trails. Young observed 6/11/94

*Virginia Rail - *Rallus limicola* - P;F

At least 3 downy chicks seen with one adult on 6/11/94

Sora - *Porzana carolina* - W;F

One present (CBC data) in the freshwater marsh during
December (and probably all winter) 1989/90 and 1990/91

American Coot - *Fulica americana* - W;F,H

Common in flooded pasture Jan-March '95. May nest some
years (like 1995?)

Black-bellied Plover - *Pluvialis squatarola* - W;B

Occasional on beach - too many dogs

Semipalmated Plover - *Charadrius semipalmatus* - W;B

Rare on beach - too many dogs

*Killdeer - *Charadrius vociferus* - W;U,F,H

Also, nested in pasture 1994 (3 chicks)

*Black Oystercatcher - *Haematopus bachmani* - P;O

Usually two birds on offshore rocks

Greater Yellowlegs - *Tringa melanoleuca* - W;F,H

Occasional in flooded pasture

Willet - *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus* - W;B

Often on beach before the first dogs arrive

Wandering Tattler - *Heteroscelus incanus* - W;O

Occasional on offshore rocks - one max

Spotted Sandpiper - *Actitis macularia* - W;O

Occasional on offshore rocks - one max

Whimbrel - *Numenius phaeopus* - W;B

Occasional on beach

Long-billed Curlew - *Numenius americanus* - W;B

Rare on beach - one was present 12 May 1994

Marbled Godwit - *Limosa fedoa* - W;B

Occasional on beach - would be common if no dogs

Ruddy Turnstone - *Arenaria interpres* - W;O,B

One record - flew from beach to offshore rocks 12 May 1994

Black Turnstone - *Arenaria melanocephala* - W;O
Commonly on offshore rocks - max 16

Surfbird - *Aphriza virgata* - W;O
Rare on offshore rocks - max 18 on 5/12/94

Sanderling - *Calidris alba* - W;B
Occasional on beach - would be common if no dogs

Western Sandpiper - *Calidris mauri* - W;B
Migrants stop on beach and are displaced by dogs

Least Sandpiper - *Calidris minutilla* - W;H
Occasional in pasture when flooded

Dunlin - *Calidris alpina* - W;B
Occasionally a few with Sanderlings

Long-billed Dowitcher - *Limnodromus scolopaceus* - W;F,H
Occasional in flooded pasture

Red Phalarope - *Phalaropus fulicaria* - W;B
A storm-blown waif was picked-up alive on Muir Beach on 11 March, 1995. Many onshore records occurred elsewhere at the same time

Red-necked Phalarope - *Phalaropus lobatus* - M;C,F
A few (max 10) individuals spring and fall

Bonaparte's Gull - *Larus philadelphia* - M;C,H
A few (max) 5 in spring, only. One was seen on flooded pasture 4/11/95

Heermann's Gull - *Larus heermanni* - M;C,B
Most frequent summer and fall May to October

Mew Gull - *Larus canus* - W;C,B
Regular late October through February

Ring-billed Gull - *Larus delawarensis* - W;C,B
Winter territorial individuals (2-5) present from August through April

California Gull - *Larus californicus* - W;C,B

Occasional singles or small groups August through April

Herring Gull - *Larus argentatus* - W;C,B

Occasional singles or small groups late October through February

Thayer's Gull - *Larus thayeri* - W;C,B

As Herring Gull

*Western Gull - *Larus occidentalis* - P;C,O,B

Nests on cliffs above cove

Glaucous-winged Gull - *Larus glaucescens* - W;C,B

Regular visitor (max 118) mid-September through March

GW x WEGU - W;C,B

This common "hybrid" occurs with winter flocks of GWGU and WEGU or, sometimes singly

Caspian Tern - *Sterna caspia* - S;C,A

Regularly fishing over cove

Elegant Tern - *Sterna elegans* - M;C,A

Most frequent summer and fall May to October

Forster's Tern - *Sterna forsteri* - M;C,A

Rarely fishing over cove

Common Murre - *Uria aalge* - P;C

Rare in cove (possibly all are sick or oiled)

Pigeon Guillemot - *Cepphus columba* - S;C

Rare in cove (two records)

Rock Dove - *Columba livia* - P;A,H

Feral from nearby ranches

Band-tailed Pigeon - *Columba fasciata* - P;A,G

Irregular - most seen flying over in groups up to 30

*Mourning Dove - *Zenaida macroura* - P;A,R,G

Regular all year at east edge of willows

Barn Owl - *Tyto alba* - M;R

One flushed from willow forest in August. Nests nearby

Great Horned Owl - *Bubo virginianus* - P;G

One in Alders in February. Nests nearby. Horse pasture in August

White-throated Swift - *Aeronautes saxatalis* - P;A

Foraging overhead - quite regular

*Anna's Hummingbird - *Calypte anna* - P;R,U,G

Nest with 2 eggs found January 95

*Allen's Hummingbird - *Selasphorus sasin* - S;R,U,G

Six males present February 95

Belted Kingfisher - *Ceryle alcyon* - W;F,C

A maximum of 3 (2 males, 1 female in January) seems high for such a small area

*Acorn Woodpecker - *Melanerpes formicivorus* - P;G

Only seen in pines and oaks adjacent to census area. Nests nearby

Red-breasted Sapsucker - *Sphyrapicus ruber* - W;R,G

One-two seen each winter visit in riparian

Nuttall's Woodpecker - *Picoides nuttallii* - M;R,G

Occasional in riparian. Nests nearby

*Downy Woodpecker - *Picoides pubescens* - P;R

2-3 always in riparian. Feeding dependent young 6/94

Hairy Woodpecker - *Picoides villosus* - P;R,G

Most often in Alders

*Northern Flicker - *Colaptes auratus* - P;R,G

Most often seen on conifer snags or foraging in groups. A male "Yellow-shafted" Flicker of Eastern North America was present on an Alder snag on 27 September 1994

*Olive-sided Flycatcher - *Contopus borealis* - S;R,G

A nest was located in the pines adjacent to the stream

*Western Wood-peewee - *Contopus sordidulus* - S;R

Also an occasional migrant. The nest located was in an alder west of the parking lot

Willow flycatcher - *Empidonax traillii* - M;R

Uncommon migrant. Two were seen in willows east of parking lot on 9/27/94

Least Flycatcher - *Empidonax minimus* - M;R

Accidental migrant. One was present in willows on 9/27/94

Gray Flycatcher - *Empidonax wrightii* - M;R

Accidental migrant. One in willows on 9/27/94

*Pacific Slope Flycatcher - *Empidonax difficilis* - S;R

Five territorial males inhabit riparian 5/12/94. Ten migrants counted on 9/27/94

*Black Phoebe - *Sayornis nigricans* - P;R,F,H

Nests under bridge on entrance road. 2-4 birds winter at Muir Beach

Say's Phoebe - *Sayornis saya* - W;H

Occasionally one winters at the horse pasture. One seen there in December 1994 (CBC)

Ash-throated Flycatcher - *Myiarchus cinerascens* - M;R

Rare migrant

Western Kingbird - *Tyrannus verticalis* - M;H

Rare migrant - one seen 12 May 1994. Nests nearby

*Tree Swallow - *Tachycineta bicolor* - S;R

Nest in holes (cavity-nester) in Alders

*Violet-green Swallow - *Tachycineta thalassina* - S;R

Nests in holes in Alders

*Northern Rough-winged Swallow - *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* - S;A,C

One nest located in bank of stream

Cliff Swallow - *Hirundo pyrrhonota* - S;R,A

Common in spring and summer. Nests nearby - gathers mud at Muir Beach

*Barn Swallow - *Hirundo rustica* - S;R,A

Same as for Cliff Swallow but nests at Muir Beach

Steller's Jay - *Cyanocitta stelleri* - P;R,G

Marauding singles or groups often in riparian - always nearby

*Scrub Jay - *Aphelocoma coerulescens* - P;R

Same as for Steller's Jay

American Crow - *Corvus brachyrhynchos* - P;B,U,R,H

Common in all land habitats

Common Raven - *Corvus corax* - P;A,B

One pair rules the beach - Others drift overhead

*Chestnut-backed Chickadee - *Parus rufescens* - P;R

Always present in the riparian - *P. r. neglectus* is the race present and only occurs in Marin County, CA

*Bushtit - *Psaltiriparus minimus* - P;R

Always present in riparian - winter flocks. Nest found in Baccharis "bush" on edge of pasture

Red-breasted Nuthatch - *Sitta canadensis* - M;R,G

Irregular. When present, usually in adjacent pines

Pygmy Nuthatch - *Sitta pygmaea* - P;R,G

Usually in pines, occasional in Alders

Brown Creeper - *Certhia americana* - W;R

Just as Pygmy Nuthatch

*Bewick's Wren - *Thryomanes bewickii* - P;R

Riparian and berry hedges

House Wren - *Troglodytes aedon* - W;R,G

One CBC record only

Winter Wren - *Troglodytes troglodytes* - W;R

Nests nearby (behind Pelican Inn) but not in the census area

*Marsh Wren - *Cistothorus palustris* - P;F

At least 2 pairs nest

Golden-crowned Kinglet - *Regulus satrapa* - W;R,G

Usually in pines, occasional in Alders and Willows

Ruby-crowned Kinglet - *Regulus calendula* - W;R

All terrestrial habitats

Western Bluebird - *Sialia mexicana* - W;H

Foraging flocks visit the corral in winter (mixed with Yellow-rumped Warblers)

*Swainson's Thrush - *Catharus ustulatus* - S;R

Five males (territories) scattered through riparian on 11 July 1994 including one in the Alders west of the parking lot. This is a declining neotropical migrant

Hermit Thrush - *Catharus guttatus* - W;R

Common in winter (8 detected 11/94). Nests in Muir Woods

*American Robin - *Turdus migratorius* - P;R,G

Two nesting territories in willow forest is minimum estimate

Varied Thrush - *Ixoreus naevius* - W;R

Irregular - 1994-1995 was a huge year for them - 30 +/- were present all winter

Wrentit - *Chamaea fasciata* - P;R,H

Probably nests in berry hedges but no evidence found

Northern Mockingbird - *Mimus polyglottos* - W;G

CBC records show this species on 7 of 15 years - max is in 1988

American Pipit - *Anthus spinoletta* - W;U,H

Also sometimes in the parking lot - usually in flocks

Cedar Waxwing - *Bombycilla cedrorum* - W;A,R

Small flocks occasionally forage Alder catkins

Loggerhead Shrike - *Lanius ludovicianus* - W;H

Declining - now rare along coast. . None found during census.

Seen in 1970's in what is now the Horse Pasture (RS)

*European Starling - *Sturnus vulgaris* - P;U,R,H

This species displaces other cavity nesters (Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Bluebird)

Solitary Vireo - *Vireo solitarius cassinii* and *V. s. solitarius* - M;R

V. s. cassinii is an occasional fall migrant. One *V. s. solitarius* (of Eastern North America) was found in the willow thicket in November 1990 (RS)

*Hutton's Vireo - *Vireo huttoni* - P;R,G

Regular in small numbers in riparian. Nests nearby (behind Pelican Inn)

*Warbling Vireo - *Vireo gilvus* - S;R

At least two nesting territories in Alder riparian

Black and White Warbler - *Mniotilta varia* - M;G

One juvenile male was in the pines along the entrance road on 10/1/94. Accidental

*Orange-crowned Warbler - *Vermivora celata* - S;R

At least three nesting territories in Willow riparian

Nashville Warbler - *Vermivora ruficapilla* - M;R

Rare spring and fall migrant - also one December record (CBC)

Yellow Warbler - *Dendroica petachia* - M;R

common fall (max = 12) uncommon spring (3) migrant

Cape May Warbler - *Dendroica tigrina* - M;G

One female was in the Pines across from the stream with Townsend's Warblers on 9/27/94. This bird was completely out of range

Yellow-rumped Warbler - *Dendroica coronata coronata* and *D. c. audubonii* - W;R,H,F,G

Both "races" are common in winter in all terrestrial habitats

Black-throated Gray Warbler - *Dendroica nigrescens* - M;R

A rather rare (3 in 10/94) fall migrant. Doubtless also in Spring but no actual records

Townsend's Warbler - *Dendroica townsendi* - M;R

Common fall and winter. Allusion to nesting in a previous report is in error!

Hermit Warbler - *Dendroica occidentalis* - M;R,G

Records for August and September (this study) and December (CBC - RS)

Palm Warbler - *Dendroica palmarum* - M;R

One was seen along a berry hedge in the pasture in November 1994. Accidental

American Redstart - *Setophaga ruticilla* - M;R

One female was seen in the willow riparian in November 1990. Accidental

MacGillivray's Warbler - *Oporonis tolmiei* - M;R

Also, a territorial male was singing all spring 1994 behind the Pelican Inn

Common Yellowthroat - *Geothlypis trichas* - W;F

A singing bird in 1989 or 1990 (RS) was probably the "Saltmarsh" subspecies - the breeding race at Point Reyes

*Wilson's Warbler - *Wilsonia pusilla* - S;R

Common migrant. Eight singing males (territories) in May 1994 in the riparian

Western Tanager - *Piranga ludoviciana* - M;R

Uncommon fall migrant - max = 4 - 27 September 1994

*Black-headed Grosbeak - *Pheucticus melanocephalus* - S;R,G

Two singing males in May 1994

Rufous-sided Towhee - *Pipilo erythrophthalmus* - P;G

Possibly nests in census area but no actual evidence found

*California Towhee - *Pipilo californicus* - P;G,R

Parents feeding young along trail east of riparian May 1994

Chipping Sparrow - *Spizella passerina* - M;U

Two young birds seen in upland habitat October 1994. The species nests in Frank's Valley within 2 miles of study plot

Savannah Sparrow - *Passerculus sandwichensis* - W;U,H

Max = 10

Fox Sparrow - *Passerella iliaca* - W;R,G

Max = about 15

*Song Sparrow - *Melospiza melodia* - P;R,G

The most common nesting passerine - 13 males on territory April 1994

Lincoln's Sparrow - *Melospiza lincolni* - W;U

Max = 7

Swamp Sparrow - *Melospiza georgiana* - W;F,U

One in upland marsh (west of Parking Lot) on 5 December 1994

White-throated Sparrow - *Zonotrichia albicollis* - W;H

One in garden near parking lot 5 December 1994. Several CBC records

Golden-crowned Sparrow - *Zonotrichia atricapilla* - W;U,R,H

Max = about 30

*White-crowned Sparrow - *Zonotrichia leucophrys* - W;U,R,H

Winter Max = about 40. *Z. l. nuttallii* nests at Muir Beach (3-5 territories). *Z. l. pugetensis* is present in winter only. *Z. l. gambellii* is a rare migrant

Dark-eyed Junco - *Junco hyemalis* - W;R

Also nests nearby (Muir Woods)

*Red-winged Blackbird - *Agelaius phoeniceus* - P;H,F

Fifteen fledglings seen in June 1994. Polygeneous

Western Meadowlark - *Sturnella neglecta* - W;H

Small flock wintered 94 & 95 in Horse Pasture. About eight birds. Nests nearby

Yellow-headed Blackbird - *Xanthophalus xanthophalus* - W;H
One female was seen during count week (1989) in pasture
(CBC)

*Brewer's Blackbird - *Euphagus cyanocephalus* - P;R,U
About ten pairs nest in conifers edging census plot

*Brown-headed Cowbird - *Malothrus ater* - S;R
On 11 July 1994 one juvenile was being fed by a Song Sparrow.
Another was found begging - foster parent not seen on same
date.

Northern Oriole - *Icterus galbula* - M;R
One was heard "rattling" in Alders in May 1994. Nests in
Frank's Valley

*Purple Finch - *Carpodacus purpureus* - P;R,G
Two nesting territories in Alder - Willow riparian

*House Finch - *Carpodacus mexicanus* - P;H,R,U
Seen on all visits - one nest found

Red Crossbill - *Loxia curvirostra* - W;G
Heard in pines along entrance road in November, 1991

*Pine Siskin - *Carduelis pinus* - P;R
One nest found in Willow riparian

Lesser Goldfinch - *Carduelis psaltria* - M;R,H
May nest but no evidence found

*American Goldfinch - *Caruelis tristis* - S;R,H
After Song Sparrow the second most common nesting passerine

*House Sparrow - *Passer domesticus* - P;H
Nests at Pelican Inn - forages in Horse Pasture