

Site Guide

Black Butte Reservoir

by Bruce Deuel

Tehama County has very few reliable locations at which to observe waterbirds and shorebirds. Probably the best site is Black Butte Reservoir on the edge of the Coast Range foothills west of Orland. Located about halfway between Sacramento and Redding, this 4,400-acre reservoir is the only sizeable body of open standing water in the county, and seasonally has shorebird and migrant land bird habitat. The southern half of the lake is in Glenn County.

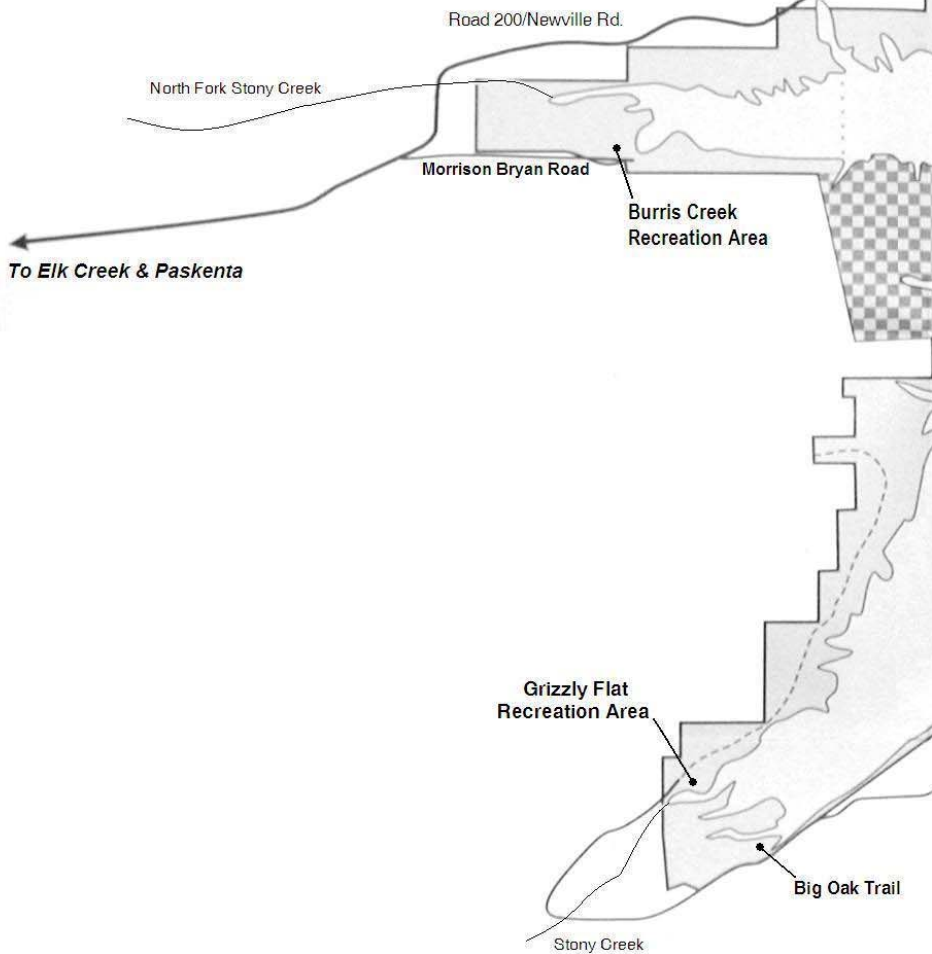
Key birds: Waterfowl numbers are never great on the lake, but sometimes flocks of American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, and other ducks raft up there during hunting season. Wood Ducks, including broods, can be found in late summer and fall in the Borrow Ponds and the Burris Creek area. Rare waterfowl are worth looking for, as Brant, Eurasian Wigeon, Greater Scaup, Surf Scoter, Hooded Merganser, and Red-breasted Merganser have all been seen here.

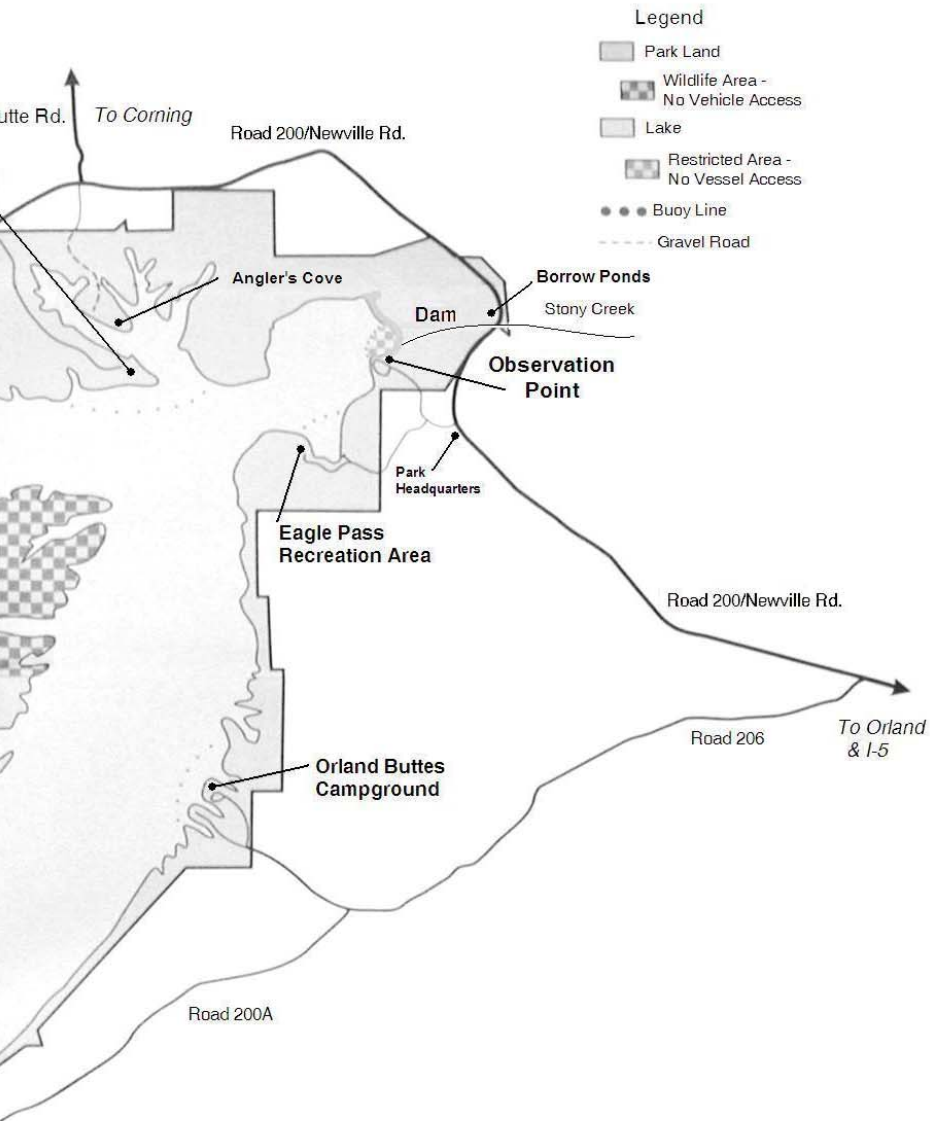
Impressive concentrations of American White Pelican show up in summer and fall, and rare Pacific and Red-throated loons and Red-necked Grebe have been found in winter. Large numbers of Clark's Grebe summer on the lake. There are always several kinds of herons about, including a Cattle Egret at Burris Creek at least once. The reservoir attracts gulls and terns. Large numbers of Bonaparte's Gull roost on the lake in winter, Common Terns have been seen during several falls, and I once found a jaeger chasing gulls in September. The rocky buttes, the dam, and the surrounding grasslands are good for wintering hawks, Golden Eagle, Merlin, and Prairie Falcon. Bald Eagles sometimes winter, especially along the course of Stony Creek, and Ospreys nest both at the Borrow Ponds and Burris Creek. Peregrine Falcon is sometimes seen.

Directions: From either north or south on I-5 take the SH 32 exit (Exit 619) in Orland, and turn west to get to the lake. Some maps call this Newville Road, which it is in Tehama County, but the Glenn portion is better known as Road 200. To bird the Glenn County portion of the lake, turn left after about 5 miles on Road 206. This will take you to Orland Buttes Campground (with an adjacent access to the lake), Big Oak Nature Trail (access to Stony Creek), and Grizzly Flat. To bird the Tehama County portion, continue west on Road 200/Newville Road to access points at Eagle Pass (fee), Observation Point, Irwin Road, Buckhorn Recreation Area (fee), and Burris Creek Wildlife Area off Morrison-Bryan Road. All these areas are signed. There is a use fee (currently \$4.00) at the developed areas, but a 15-minute free pass can be

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Black I
Buckhorn
Recreation
Area





obtained for a quick look at those spots. The bridge over Burris Creek on Morris-Bryan Road is no longer drivable, but access to the entire west end of the lake is still available through the wildlife area parking lot, after the rainy season. Four-wheel drive is needed at other times. There are also some ponds (referred to as the Borrow Ponds hereafter) below the dam that are accessed from Newville Road just opposite the Farm Sanctuary, after the road crosses Stony Creek.

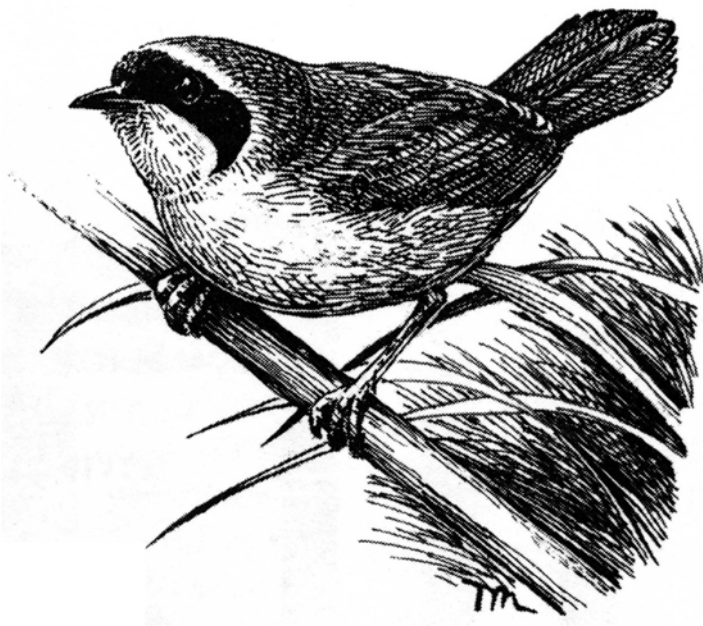
An alternative route to the lake from the north is to take Corning Road (Exit 631) and drive west to Black Butte Road, thence south to the lake. This route takes you by some ponds, rice fields, and lots of grassland.

The Borrow Ponds and the Burris Creek Wildlife Area are where the shorebirding is best when the water levels are right (summer and fall). Numbers aren't large, but the variety has been good, with Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Black-necked Stilt, Marbled Godwit, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, and Pectoral Sandpiper among the rarer species that have been found. Other places to look are the coves at the end of Irwin Road (just east of Buckhorn Recreation Area), and the north end of Black Butte Road on Canoa Farms property. Check along Chittenden Road, as well. Marsh loving blackbirds (including Great-tailed Grackle) and Blue Grosbeaks, as well as shorebirds, have been seen in this area.

The marsh and willows below the dam and adjacent to the borrow pits frequently host Black-crowned Night-Heron, Sora, Virginia Rail, Common Moorhen and Wilson's Snipe. Long-tailed and Parasitic jaegers, Sabine's Gull, and Arctic Tern are possible candidates to occur during fall migration. Buckhorn Boat Ramp area is the best place to look for gulls, terns and possible jaegers. Lesser Nighthawks fly over the campground on summer evenings as well as along the lower parts of Newville Road. Lewis's Woodpeckers are common in most winters. Passerine birding is best where Stony Creek comes in to the south end of the lake, and in the big willows and fig trees where the North Fork Stony Creek comes in to the west end (reached from the Burris Creek Wildlife Area parking lot). Rock Wrens are resident at Overlook Point next to the dam. The nearby grasslands north of the reservoir have had rare species such as Greater Roadrunner, Northern Shrike, Sage Thrasher and Grasshopper Sparrow. Many raptors are found here during winter, and longspurs should be looked for in the Horned Lark flocks.

Another nearby location for water birds is the farm ponds along Tehama Ave east of Hwy 5 north of Corning. These two ponds often have flocks of Canada Geese that sometimes have stray Ross's and Snow geese mixed in, even during summer. Other waterfowl that have occurred include Greater White-fronted Goose, Hooded Merganser, Blue-winged Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, and Canvasback to name just a few. The pond on the north side of the road sometimes has shorebirds along the mud flats. Forster's Tern has been seen during spring and this is a likely location for a stray White-faced Ibis or a rare shorebird. Directions: take the Tehama Ave exit

off Hwy 5, proceed east on Gyle/A11 road to Old Hwy 99W. Turn left (north) and proceed about a mile and turn right onto Tehama Ave. The ponds are several miles down the road just beyond the large irrigation aqueduct along both sides of the road.



Common Yellowthroat

sketch by Tim Manolis