

Site Guide

Gray Lodge Wildlife Area

By Bruce Deuel and John Kemper

Habitats: Freshwater marsh, riparian woodland, annual grassland.

Specialty birds: Resident-Wood Duck, Cinnamon Teal, White-tailed Kite, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Magpie, California Towhee. *Winter*-Greater White-fronted and Ross's Geese, Eurasian Wigeon, Sandhill Crane.

Other key birds: Resident - American and Least Bitterns (the latter species is rare), Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, Ring-necked Pheasant, Virginia Rail, Sora, Common Moorhen, Great Horned Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, Common Yellowthroat. *Summer* – House Wren, Blue Grosbeak. *Winter* – Snow Goose, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, American Pipit, Phainopepla, Orange-crowned Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow.

Directions: From the junction of State Route 99 and State Route 20 in Yuba City, go 9.4 miles north on SR 99 to Pennington Road in Live Oak, then travel 8 miles west (Pennington Road makes many turns, eventually becoming North Butte Road) to Almond Orchard Road. Go north 1.7 miles on Almond Orchard Road (which changes its name to Pennington Road as it crosses the county line) to the entrance to Gray Lodge Wildlife Area on the left. (Note that there are two different roads, in two different counties, bearing the name Pennington Road.) From the entrance it is 2.4 miles to parking lot 14 (fee, chemical toilets, small museum with mounted birds). During waterfowl hunting season (October-January) stop and pay the fee at the check station at the entrance on days it is open. Approaching from the north on SR 99, turn west in the center of Gridley on Sycamore Street and go about 6 miles to Pennington Road, and then take Pennington Road south about 3 miles to the entrance.

The birding: A self-guided nature trail (paved, barrier free) begins at the parking lot and goes about 0.3 mile north to a viewing platform. A longer, 2-mile loop walk starts at the southeast corner of the parking lot and goes past two viewing blinds. The nature trail runs next to a marsh that contains mostly Gadwall, American Coots, and Common Moorhens, but often has Blue-winged Teal in winter. Other marsh dwellers such as American Bittern, herons and egrets, Virginia Rail, Sora, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Song and Lincoln's Sparrows, and Red-winged Blackbirds can be found. Least Bitterns are very seldom seen; May and June, when they sometimes call, seem to be best.

The other trail goes by several larger ponds with a variety of ducks, geese, and shorebirds. Both trails have good riparian woodland. In winter look for Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and a variety of sparrows. Nuttall's and Downy Woodpeckers and California Towhees are permanent residents.

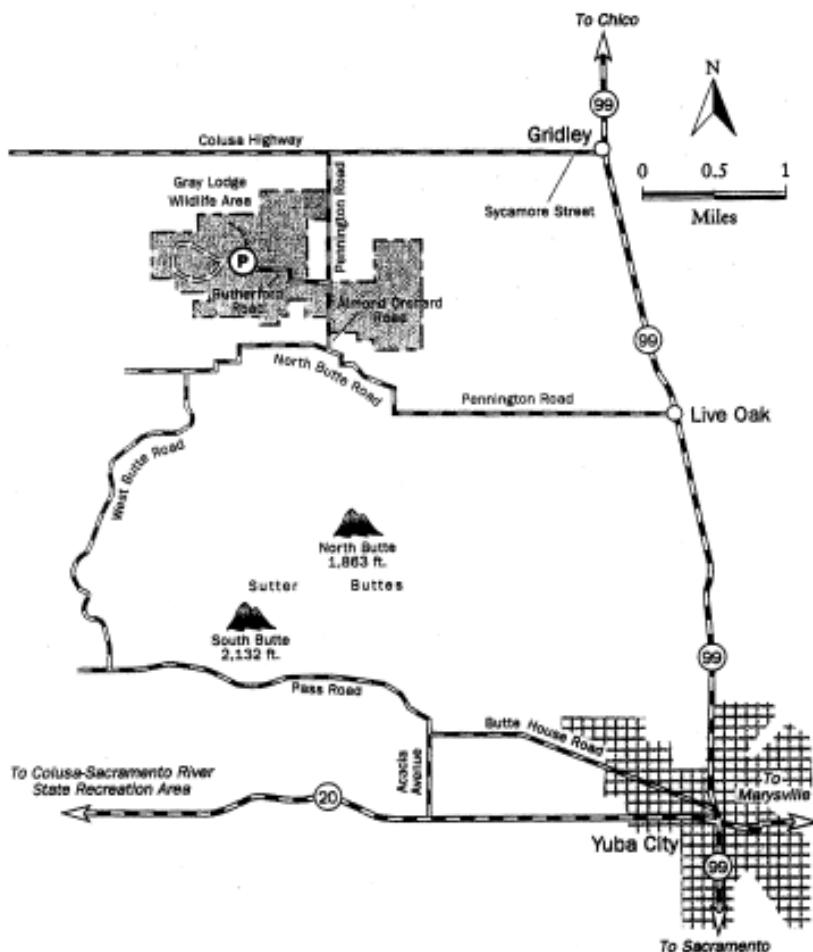
From the viewing platform a large mixture of waterfowl is usually visible. In late fall and winter, especially in November and December, there often will be large numbers of Snow Geese, and thousands may suddenly roar into the air, responding to some sudden impulse, such as a passing Bald Eagle. Ross's Geese are typically mixed in with the Snows, and blue morphs of both species can be seen. Uncommon ducks such as Eurasian Wigeon, Blue-winged Teal, and Eurasian Green-winged Teal are often found here. The swampy area east of the platform often has Wood Ducks and Great Horned Owls are frequently heard and sometimes seen near dusk.

An auto tour route (3 mile loop) also begins at Parking Lot 14. Visitors must stay in their cars except in the 3 other parking lots the loop passes. All the species of waterfowl found in the Sacramento Valley can be seen from the loop, though diving ducks are limited mainly to Ring-necked Ducks, Bufflehead, and Ruddy Ducks. Raptors are plentiful in winter. Watch for Ring-necked Pheasant, Killdeer, Black Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike, American Pipit, Western Meadowlark, and blackbirds. Blue Grosbeak is a summer visitor. The trees around the parking lots support migrant and wintering passerines, especially warblers and sparrows.

During the non-hunting season other parts of the area are accessible. Parking Lot 13 south of the headquarters is adjacent to more marshes and upland grasslands. The east side parking lots have large riparian groves that are excellent for migrants in spring, and Yellow-billed Magpies nest in them.

General Information: Gray Lodge is an attractive area, with a mix of habitats. It doesn't have as many large open water ponds as Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge but it has more riparian habitat. A dominant nearby feature is the Sutter Buttes, which, if the weather is not foggy, provide a dramatic backdrop for large flights of waterfowl. The buttes are the remnants of an ancient volcano, providing the only relief from the general flatness of the Central Valley for its entire length. Birding along the roads surrounding the Buttes is often excellent in winter for open country birds, such as Ferruginous Hawks, Prairie Falcons, Northern Shrikes, and Mountain Bluebirds. If the Butte Sink ponds west of West Butte Road are flooded, there can be large flocks of diving ducks.

Gas, food, and lodging are available in Yuba City and Gridley. There is camping at Colusa-Sacramento River State Recreation Area in Colusa. Additional information can be obtained by calling the wildlife area at 530-846-7500, or by visiting the area's website: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/lands/wa/region2/graylodge>.



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Additional maps of the area can be found at the following website:
<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/lands/wa/region2/graylodge/maps.html>.

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