

Site Guide

Turlock Lake Area, Stanislaus County

By Jim Gain

Description of Area:

Situated along the eastern edge of Stanislaus County, Turlock Lake is surrounded by rolling grasslands. The lakeshore itself is largely devoid of trees except for the area around the day-use picnic grounds. The campground however, is host to a stand of riparian woodland with valley oaks, Fremont cottonwoods, California buckeye, willows and an under story of poison oak and Himalayan blackberry. There is an old oxbow lake by the entrance kiosk. There is some wetland habitat around the oxbow lake and at Hall Pond.

How to Get There:

Coming from Modesto or parts north: From Hwy 99, take the Briggsmore Ave. exit and go left over the freeway and follow Briggsmore Ave. 8.75 miles to the junction with Wellsford Rd. and turn right (south). At the first stop sign turn left (east) on Dusty Rd. and continue 1.5 miles to Albers Rd. and turn right (south). At the junction with Hwy 132 (Yosemite Blvd.) turn left (east), drive 12.6 miles (through the town of Waterford) to Robert's Ferry. Take Robert's Ferry Rd. south to Lake Rd.

Coming from Turlock or parts south: From Hwy 99, take the Keyes Rd. exit and head east 14.5 miles to Hawkins Rd., turn left and follow it to the junction with Lake Rd. and turn right.

Birding the Site:

The Turlock Lake Area is most productive in the winter, but it can be visited at any season. The area has four main areas that are birded the most: Davis Rd., the day-use picnic area, the campground, and the inlet. One additional quickly-visited spot is Hall Pond is along Lake Rd., a little over 2 miles east of the entrance to the campground. It has had Green Heron and Sora in the past.

- *Davis Rd. area* - In winter, drive this road and check the outlet canal for Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead and Common Merganser. Barrow's Goldeneye has been found here in the past. Continue past the dam area and look at the sparrow flocks closely as Sage Sparrow (pale form) and Lark Bunting (rare) have been seen along the road. Winter raptors such as Bald and Golden eagles, Prairie Falcon, Merlin, Ferruginous and Rough-legged hawks, and Short-eared Owl can all be found here with luck. Sage Thrasher has also made an appearance here.
- *Day-use picnic areas* - This is a State Recreation Area and it has day-

use fees. Phainopepla has been seen right next to the restrooms above the entrance kiosk. Scope the lake from various vantage points to look for grebe species (Eared, Clark's, Western, Pied-billed, and rarely Horned), Common Merganser, and occasionally Common Loon. Bald Eagle and Osprey can usually be found as well.

- *Campground area* - This area is posted no day-use, but if you ask a park employee for permission to park and bird the area, you may be allowed to do so. This is a great riparian spot with lots of trees and under story along the cliff-face. During migration this can be a good spot for flycatchers, warblers, and such.
- *Inlet area* - The gate to the inlet is now locked in winter, but can be accessed with a combination. Contact a local birder (Jim Gain – phalarope@sbcglobal.com; or Harold Reeve – birder@sbcglobal.com) before going there. The grasslands along the edge of the lake in this area have frequently hosted Mountain Plover in December and January. Check the inlet canal and lake for Common and Red-breasted (rare) mergansers, grebes, Osprey and other raptors. In summer, a small island in the lake near here has hosted a colony of nesting Forster's Terns.

Target Birds:

Winter: *Grassland species:* Raptors such as Bald and Golden eagles, Prairie Falcon, Merlin, Ferruginous and Rough-legged hawks, and Short-eared Owl. *Open water and shoreline species:* Common Merganser, grebes, Osprey, and Spotted Sandpiper. *Woodland species:* Cooper's, Sharp-shinned and Red-shouldered hawks, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Hutton's Vireo, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Varied Thrush, Phainopepla, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, and Purple Finch.

Summer: Osprey, Forster's Tern (nesting colony), Ash-throated Flycatcher, Phainopepla, Yellow-breasted Chat, Bullock's Oriole.

Migrant: Flycatchers, vireos, Swainson's Thrush, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings.

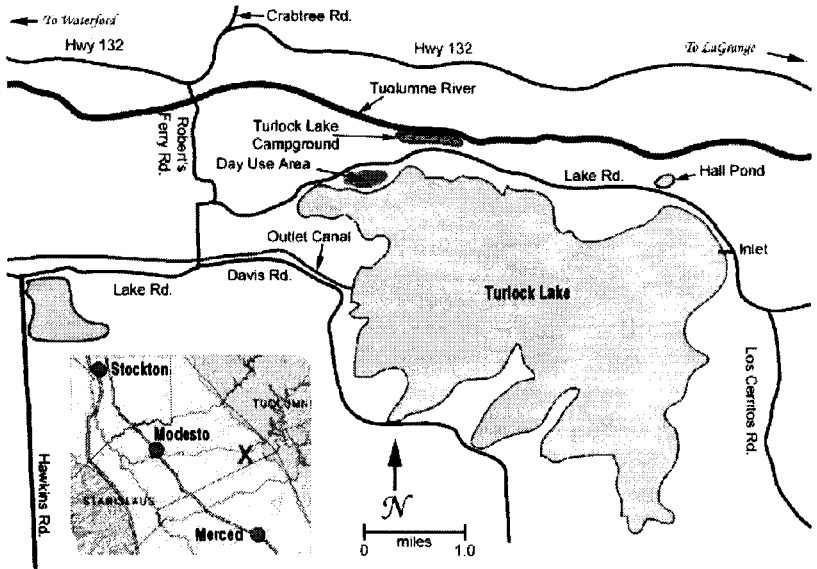
Rarities: White-winged Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Mountain Plover, Red-naped Sapsucker, Virginia's Warbler, Sage Sparrow (pale form), Lark Bunting.

Facilities:

The day-use area (fee) has 3 separate restroom stations, some of which have shower stalls. There are numerous picnic tables, including handicap accessible tables. The campground area (fee) has campsites and a canoe-launching area. The closest stores are in LaGrange or Waterford. The

closest hotels are in Modesto (15 miles west) and Turlock (15 miles southwest).

Map of Turlock Lake Area (courtesy Stanislaus County Planning Board)



Addendum -- Light-morph Harlan's Red-tailed Hawks in the Central Valley

In reference to the paper on "A light-morph Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk in Solano County" (Hampton, CVBC Bulletin 8:30-32, 2005), Dick Erickson (pers. comm.) has brought to our attention four additional records of this form for California, two of these from the Central Valley: One seen at San Luis Wasteway Wildlife Management Area near Los Banos, Merced County, on 7 October 1970 by Roger C. Wilbur (Chandik et al., Amer. Birds 25:100-106); and single birds seen at Honey Lake, Lassen County, on 4 February 1972 by Dick Erickson et al., at Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, Glenn County, on 13 November 1977 by David DeSante, and at Fort Bidwell, Modoc County, on 26 November 1977 by Joseph Morlan (Erickson and Morlan, Amer. Birds 32:250-255). These sources indicate that either written descriptions and/or sketches were submitted for each of these records, but the present whereabouts of this documentary evidence is uncertain (Mike Rogers, pers. comm.).