

# MODESTO WATER QUALITY CONTROL FACILITY

Eric Caine



## **ACCESS:**

The Modesto Water Quality Control facility is only accessible on the second Saturday of each month. Birders must contact the office at least 4 days prior to the visit by either emailing or calling:

Sonya Morton (209) 342-4501 [smorton@modestogov.com](mailto:smorton@modestogov.com)

**DIRECTIONS:** This wastewater treatment plant is located at 7007 Jennings Road in southwest Stanislaus County. At one time, the ponds were open to the general public Monday through Saturday, but in recent years the facility has become available only under restricted conditions. Public entry is currently available only on the second Saturday of each month. Birders must receive permission in advance by emailing the plant manager on the Monday before their visit.

From downtown Modesto, drive on H Street for 2.7 miles until you get to Carpenter Road. Make a left (south) and go for 3.5 miles until you come to Keyes Road [J16]. Turn right (west) for 1.9 miles until you come to Jennings Road. Make a left on Jennings Road and go south for 2.0 miles until you arrive at the closed entrance gate.

Assuming you have received permission, you may call the plant operator with the number you have been given. A worker will be at the gate shortly to let you in. You must sign in at the main office, sign a liability waiver form, and obtain a map that shows which ponds you are permitted to visit. Be careful to observe the "off limits" portions of the ponds, which are marked by signs prohibiting birding past that point. When you finish your tour, you must

sign out. There is no help needed for exiting the facility. Just turn right past the composting area to continue to the exit gate.

**HABITAT:** The plant itself features large storage and circulation ponds bordered by graveled levee roads. Along the west side of the storage facility, there is an edge of good riparian habitat featuring a mix of cottonwood, willow, button willow, and box elder. The riparian habitat, though not birded nearly often enough, has produced two records for Indigo Bunting. Currently the riparian area cannot be entered, but you may still scan the area with binoculars and/or scope from the levee for birds. During spring and fall, this area features good numbers of passerine migrants, as well. California Thrashers, formerly common among the extensive areas of Atriplex, have become harder to find since most of the Atriplex plants were eradicated. The ponds and levees have featured all of the expected Central Valley wintering and resident waterfowl. The ponds and levee roads also attracts all of the expected species of gulls and shorebirds.

**BIRDS:** Pied-billed and Eared Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great and Snowy Egrets, White-faced Ibis, Canada Goose, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, American Coot, Black-bellied Plover, Killdeer, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Least and Western Sandpipers, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes; Ring-billed, California, and Herring Gulls; Forster's and Black Terns, Tree and Cliff Swallows, Lazuli Bunting, Red-winged Blackbird, Blue Grosbeak.

