

Site Guide Reprinted from the Central Valley Bird Club Bulletin

DEL PUERTO CANYON AND MINES ROAD

By John Kemper

General Information: Mines Road and Del Puerto Canyon are popular with birders because they give access to the heart of the dry interior Coast Range. At least a portion of these foothill areas can be considered as part of the Central Valley because the Valley has been defined as including the adjacent slopes up to the 1000-foot level. This article principally describes Del Puerto Canyon, since much of it lies below that level. The roads are paved and reasonably good, although the section of Mines Road from MP 11.8 to MP 20 in Alameda County is narrow and lacks a white center line. Traffic is usually light, which is nice for birding, but it can lull one into a false sense of security. Alertness for traffic is necessary, because almost all the birding is done from the roadside. Directions: For access to Del Puerto Canyon from the Central Valley, turn off I-5 where the sign says Patterson -- Del Puerto Canyon Road goes west from here. For access from the north from I-580, exit at North Livermore Avenue and go south 1.2 miles to center of Livermore (flagpole). Continue straight, onto South Livermore Avenue. After 1.8 miles, South Livermore Avenue bends to the east and becomes Tesla Road. The junction with Mines Road is 2.3 miles from the flagpole.

The birding: Almost all of the property along the roads is private. Hence, the birding must be done from the roadsides, with the exception of **Frank Raines Regional Park** and **Minnear Day Use Area in Del Puerto Canyon**. When stopping, it is advisable to avoid parking near houses, or blocking gates. The principal birds looked for here by many birders are *Greater Roadrunner*, *Lewis's Woodpecker*, *Phainopepla*, and *Lawrence's Goldfinch*. All of them are uncommon to rare, and can be difficult to find.

The most likely places:

- For Greater Roadrunner: In Del Puerto Canyon, around MP 10.
- For the Lewis's Woodpecker: In Santa Clara County, MP 4.5.
- For Phainopepla: In Alameda County, at various places from about MP 5 to MP 13.
- For Lawrence's Goldfinch: Best locations have varied from year to year, but in recent years a good place has been near The Junction, where Mines Road, San Antonio Valley Road, and Del Puerto Road come together; another place is at Frank Raines Regional Park.

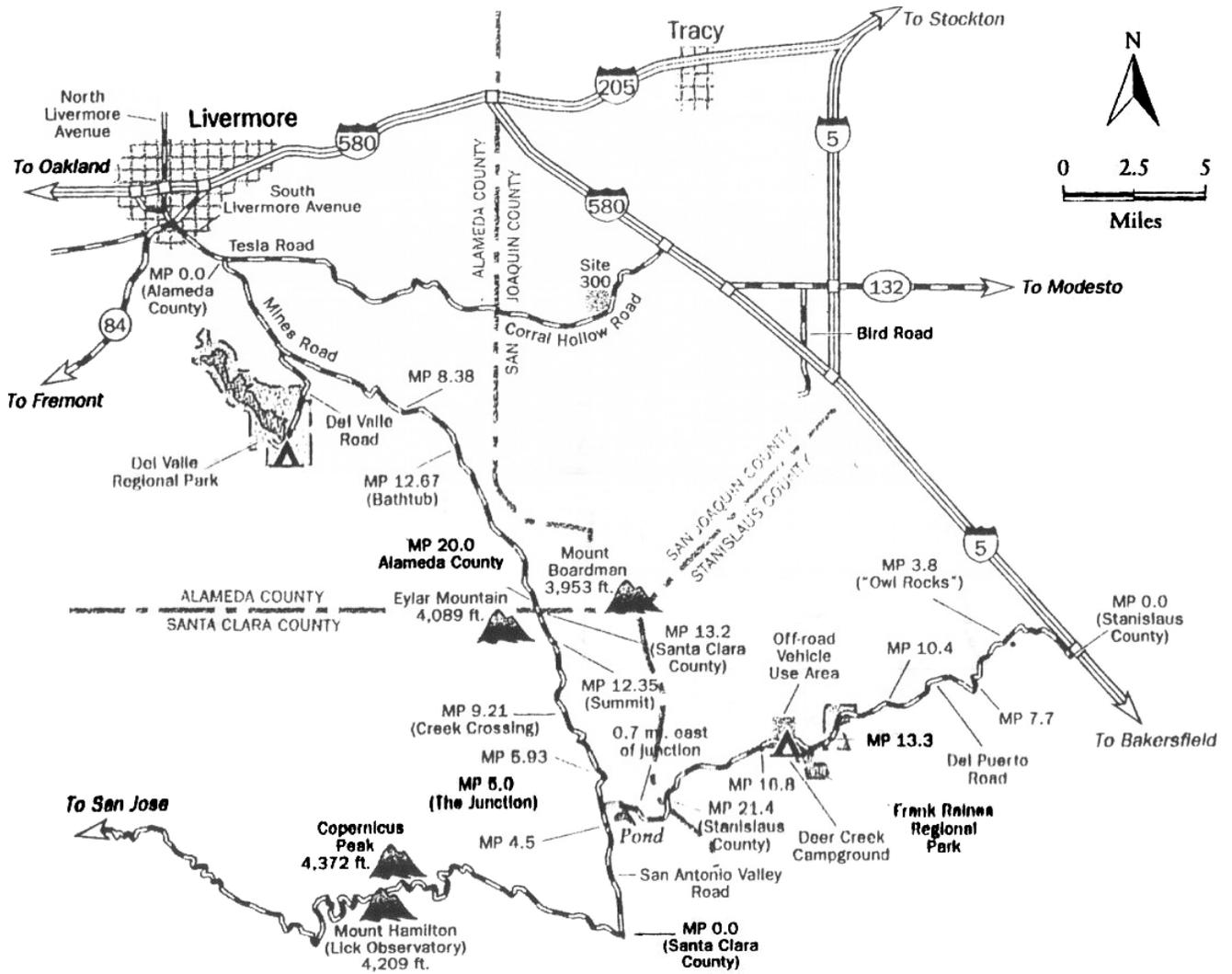
The Junction, (MP 5.0 Santa Clara County). There is a small cafe here, open every day except holidays from 10 to 7 for cold drinks and light meals. The owners put out hummingbird feeders, and visitors enjoy watching the Anna's Hummingbirds dispute over possession. It is a pleasant place to sit outdoors at a picnic table in the shade and look for Lawrence's Goldfinch, since this area has been one of the better places for them. Mostly, however, you will see and hear Acorn Woodpeckers. The area across the road around the fire station traditionally has been a good place to look for Lawrence's Goldfinch. Lewis's Woodpeckers have been seen along the road both north and south of *The Junction* DEL PUERTO ROAD MP 16.8 (Stanislaus County): The creek goes under the road through a culvert. Parking is available next to the road here. This stretch, both above and below the culvert, has regularly had Yellow-breasted Chat in the past. In May, they generally can be heard singing in the willow

thickets along the creek. There are many places along the edge of the road where you can look down into the creek and try to get a look, although you should remember to watch for cars. Hutton's Vireo and Spotted Towhee are residents. In migration, watch for Warbling Vireo, Wilson's Warbler, and Western Tanager among other migrants. Deer Creek Campground, MP 16.2 (Stanislaus County): This is a part of Frank Raines Regional Park. Access to the creek is possible here, although it is a popular place for off-road vehicles. Birding next to the creek can be good, provided the campground is not too crowded. Look for Lawrence's Goldfinch, as well as *regulars* such as Black Phoebe, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Lesser Goldfinch, woodpeckers, and warblers.

Frank Raines Park Day Use Area, MP 15.1 (Stanislaus County): Picnicking and restrooms are available. Many of the birds mentioned above will be here, too, provided there aren't too many people. **Minnear Day Use Area**, MP 13.3 (Stanislaus County): This is also a part of Frank Raines Regional Park. There is ample room next to the road to park, and there are pedestrian openings through the fence on both sides of the road. From the parking area on a quiet night in spring, Common Poorwills can be heard calling from the surrounding ridges. The nearby trees have had Western Screech-Owl (uncommon resident) and Northern Pygmy-Owl (rare resident). MP 10.4 (Stanislaus County): At this point the creek makes a sharp double bend and passes beneath the road, with rocky cliffs nearby. Parking is available on a broad shoulder about 100 yards west of where the creek goes under the road. Rock and Canyon wrens occur here, and there is a possibility of seeing a Say's Phoebe (uncommon resident). Look for Costa's Hummingbird (uncommon summer visitor) here as well as elsewhere along this stretch of road, especially wherever there is a tree tobacco growing nearby. MP 7.7 (Stanislaus County): Rocky outcroppings along the road. There is not enough room to park, so it is necessary to go beyond and walk back. Cassin's Kingbird, which is at the northern limit of its range here, occurs on an irregular basis in summer. Other birds to look for are Say's Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike, Rock Wren, and Lark and Rufous-crowned sparrows. Grassy slopes may have Grasshopper Sparrow, which is rare in spring and summer. In this open country, don't forget to check the sky for a soaring Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, or Common Raven

Owl Rocks, MP 3.8 (Stanislaus County): The cliffs here abound with potholes, some of which have whitewash below them, showing they have been occupied. This spot is known for having had nesting Barn and Great Horned owls, and has also had White-throated Swift, Say's Phoebe, and Phainopepla. In summer at dusk, look and listen for Common Poorwill.

Bird Road This is a good place for Lesser Nighthawks. To get there, from the junction of I-5 and CA 132, go west 0.7 miles on CA 132 to Bird Road, and turn left (south). (From the junction of I-580 and CA 132, go east about 2 miles on CA 132 to Bird Road, and turn right.) It is about 2.5 miles south on Bird Road to the end of the road. Arrange to be there a half-hour or so before sunset. The nighthawks forage up and down the shallow canyon, generally fairly close to the ground, and sometimes fly over the small pond on the left side of the road about 100 yards before the end. May is the best month.



Mines Road and Del Puerto Canyon

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