

The Community VOICE

Rohnert Park, Cotati, & Penngrove

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Discover the birds of Cotati on a guided walk

By John DellOsso

Friday, May 4, 2007 9:57 AM PDT

Not many people think of a developed area like a city for bird watching. Places like national, state or local parks are more likely to be in the forefront of our minds. But don't let that fool you. Bird watching can take place in many places, including your own neighborhood. Just get outside, slow your pace down, listen and look.

Bird watching is one of the most popular outdoor activities in the country. Some important items to have as you venture into your neighborhood or local park are binoculars, a field guide (some suggestions later in this article), good observation skills like looking for movement, and good listening which we'll discuss in a bit.

Binoculars come in all shapes and sizes (and prices) so choose carefully. There are two numbers on every pair of binoculars. What do they mean? The first number is the power of the binoculars. It tells you how many times as big the image will appear. The second number is the diameter of the front lenses, in millimeters. It tells you the light-gathering ability of the binoculars. The bigger this second number, the larger and heavier the binoculars, and the better they will work in dim light. A standard pair of binoculars would be 7x42 but go to a local optics store and test them out for yourself. Put them around your neck and ask yourself if they're too heavy.

Field guides have been around for many years. Some of the more popular guides include (not in any particular order): The Sibley Field Guide to Birds, Peterson Field Guide series, National Geographic Society, Field Guide to the Birds of North America, and numerous others. Any field guide would be a help to start with. Check out your local library or bookstore for selections.

Listening for birds is just as critical as looking for them. As you learn more bird songs and add them to your repertoire, you'll be more likely to find the species through their song. For example, if you hear a California towhee's series of teek notes, you'll know that their preferred habitat is usually under cover so you would be less likely to look up high when looking for the bird.

As well as the upcoming walk on the Birds of Cotati on May 6, look for other events in your local area such as the annual Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count, Great Backyard Bird Count (February) and International Migratory Bird Day (May).

Bird watching can help you connect (or reconnect) with our great outdoors. It helps keep your senses sharp, gets you vertical by going outside, helps reduce stress and adds exercise to your routine. Birding is a social activity which can be done with family members and friends. At the same time, it can be a solitary adventure between you and nature.

John DellOsso, a long-time resident of Cotati, has worked for the National Park Service for over 20 years and is Chief of Interpretation & Resource Education at Point Reyes National Seashore. He has been keeping records of the birds he has spotted along the Laguna de Santa Rosa channel in Cotati for years. The May 6 bird walk is an opportunity to learn about local resident and migratory birds from a local expert.

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