

## The Sounds of Winter

By Bob Garrison

A watchable wildlife article on listening? You bet. Wildlife viewing is a sensory activity obviously involving sight, but enhanced by smell, touch and hearing. In our noisy world, the quiet sounds of the natural world often go unheard. But for those with a keen ear, winter is the perfect time to follow the call of the wild.

Winter is by far the best time of year to experience California's diverse wildlife. If you haven't noticed, winter wildlife is all around you, whether you live in the city, country, desert or redwoods. This winter abundance of wildlife is due to two factors, both of which are related to California's mild Mediterranean climate characterized by hot dry summers and cool wet winters. First, [hundreds] of species of birds migrate from harsh northern climates and high Sierra peaks to winter in California's lower elevations. Ducks, geese and swans are the most well known migrants traveling south along the Pacific Flyway, but hawks, cranes, sandpipers, sparrows, and a host of other species also find a winter home in the golden state. Second, many of California's year-round residents lay low during the hot dry summers. Some of the smaller mammals and amphibians actually enter a summer dormancy called *estivation* similar to winter hibernation in colder climates. When winter rains stimulate plant growth and fill ponds, these animals awaken and begin their breeding cycle.

On your wildlife excursions this month, start in your own backyard. Listen for the white- and golden-crowned sparrows scratching for seeds in your flower beds, robins and cedar waxwings noisily feasting on berries, and flocks of bushtits calling to each other as they search for insects. A croaking chorus of frogs and toads indicates seasonal ponds or puddles are ready for a new generation of polliwogs. In the fog-prone Central Valley, hearing wildlife may be all you can do. Listen for the calls of geese, swans and cranes flying overhead. Along the coast, follow the shrill calls of shorebirds searching the water's edge for food.

Tuning your ears to the sounds of nature provides a reassuring reminder of our connection to the natural world. The next time you are out in the yard, in a park or on a trail, stop and close your eyes for a moment and quietly listen. The sounds of winter will call out to you in ways you never imagined.

Places to hear wildlife:

Besides your own backyard and nearby natural areas, follow wildlife viewing road signs or check the **California Wildlife Viewing Guide** for directions to these areas selected for their diversity of wintering wildlife:

Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary  
Cache Creek Management Area  
Sonoma State Beaches/Bodega Bay  
Gray Lodge Wildlife Area  
Folsom Lake State Recreation Area/American River Parkway  
Valley Grasslands of Merced County  
Millerton Lake State Recreation Area  
Richardson Bay Audubon Sanctuary  
San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge  
Elkhorn Slough Ecological Reserve  
Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve  
Western San Gabriel Driving Loop  
Blue Sky Ecological Reserve  
Anza Borrego Desert State Park

You can purchase a *California Wildlife Viewing Guide* which provides detailed wildlife viewing information and directions to these and over 190 other wildlife viewing sites by visiting [www.CAWatchableWildlife.org](http://www.CAWatchableWildlife.org).

Reprinted courtesy of *Outdoor California*, California Department of Fish and Game ([www.dfg.ca.gov](http://www.dfg.ca.gov))



[www.naturetourismplanning.com](http://www.naturetourismplanning.com).