



LENGTH: 25" ♂ > ♀
WINGSPAN: 34"

Common Merganser

Mergus merganser

Common Mergansers are heavy, long-bodied ducks that ride low in fresh water ponds, lakes, rivers, and reservoirs. Their diet includes fish and aquatic invertebrates such as snails and crayfish.

These Mergansers use tree cavities for nests, but will also use rock crevices or earthen banks. They build a large, bulky nest, using dead weeds, moss, and feathers, with a lining of down.

Because they are large and heavy birds, their flight requires a long take-off run, but once in the air, they are strong flyers.



Hooded Merganser

Lophodytes cucullatus

LENGTH: 18"
WINGSPAN: 24" ♂ > ♀

These are the smallest of the mergansers, diving ducks that have a thin bill and a distinct fan-shaped crest. Hooded Mergansers live in areas with fresh water lakes and reservoirs. They are usually seen in small flocks, usually of ten or fewer members.

Hooded Mergansers nest in tree cavities in wooded areas near lakes, usually 15 to 20 feet high. They line their nests with leaves, grass and down.



Northern Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

LENGTH: 25"
WINGSPAN: 35" ♂ > ♀

Mallards are the largest of the dabbling ducks. They live in mud flats and all fresh water habitats. Their diet includes seeds, shoots of sedges and other kinds of aquatic vegetation, grass, grain, acorns, insects, and aquatic invertebrates.

Mallards build nests of cattails, reeds, or grasses near water, and then line them with down. Sometimes they nest in hollow logs.

When these ducks molt, they are unable to fly for about a month. During this time, they hide in cover, keeping any vocalization to a minimum.

Code of Birding Ethics

(Adapted from the Audubon Society)

- Observe birds quietly. Do not throw things at or chase birds. Do not "thrash about" the bush to flush birds.
- Avoid approaching a nest, or parents at a nest, too closely. Do not handle eggs or young.
- Use tape recorders with discretion to prevent driving birds from their territories.
- Bird in small groups. Walk in a single file line or spread out to prevent damage to surrounding habitats.
- Do not "tree whack" to arouse cavity dwellers.
- Avoid trampling fragile habitats, especially marshes, grasslands, and wildflowers. Stay on established trails.
- Do not trespass onto private property without written permission.
- Please do not litter.

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WATER BIRDS

Life as a bird has the fascinating advantage of flight. Fortunately we have some of the best birding in the Bay Area here in Livermore. You may find a diverse array of these water birds residing near our arroyos, ponds, and lakes as they dabble, dive, waddle or wade while they look for their next meal.



Wood Duck

Aix sponsa

LENGTH: 18.5"
WINGSPAN: 30" ♂ > ♀

These water birds have small bills and long tails. They live in areas with fresh water lakes, ponds, rivers or reservoirs. As shy ducks, they fly off at the first sign of intruders.

Wood Ducks find tree cavities for their nests, or use nesting boxes. They use wood chips and down for lining them. The young ducklings have sharp claws for climbing out of the nest cavity when they are ready to fledge.

The Wood Duck's diet includes seeds, acorns, berries, and grain, plus terrestrial and aquatic insects. They also eat invertebrates such as crayfish, snails, and worms.



LENGTH: 46"
WINGSPAN: 72" ♂ > ♀

Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias

Great Blue Herons are large, sturdy water birds that live in all kinds of fresh water habitats and mudflats. In flight, they are identified by their slow and steady wingbeats. They have large yellow, dagger-like bills, bluish-gray plumage, and long gray legs. Their call sounds like a harsh croak.

These herons hunt while wading slowly in quiet water, sometimes spreading their wings out, casting shadows to help them see under the surface for prey. The shadows also attract prey to areas that appear to be safe for them, but actually lure them to within the heron's reach. In addition to fish, their diet includes aquatic invertebrates and small vertebrates, such as frogs, toads, snakes, and rodents.

Great Blue Herons construct well-built nests of interwoven sticks. They line them with twigs and leaves, and sometimes consider needles. Nests are located in trees 30 to 70 feet up from the ground. Usually the mated pair have three to five eggs to nurture toward adulthood, often within a colony of herons.

Heron chicks are born nearly naked with eyes closed. Soon they start to call noisily, begging for food. Both parents bring food and regurgitate it onto the nest, or directly into the chicks' mouths.



LENGTH: 39"
WINGSPAN: 51" ♂ > ♀

Great Egret

Ardea alba

These graceful white birds are tall and slender with a dagger-like yellow bill and black legs. They live in fresh water marshes and mud flats, foraging for food by slowly walking in shallow water, looking for prey. Their S-shaped necks allow for very fast motion to successfully spear and grab their catch.

Great Egrets build fragile nests of sticks and twigs in deciduous trees, eight to forty feet up from the ground. They usually have about three bluish eggs to incubate, with both parents taking turns incubating and feeding the nestlings.

Snowy Egret

Egretta thula

Snowy Egrets are small and slender, with white plumage, black bills and legs that are black with yellow feet. They use their feet to stir up the water and mud for flushing out prey.

These egrets are gregarious, and roost communally when not breeding.

When they are ready, they build a flat, flimsy nest of sticks in shrubs not more than ten feet off the ground. They line it with rushes and small twigs. Both parents work on the nest, with the male collecting the materials while the female constructs it.



LENGTH: 24"
WINGSPAN: 41"
♂ + ♀ Same size



LENGTH: 13"
WINGSPAN: 20"
♂ + ♀ Same size

Belted Kingfisher

Ceryle alcyon

Belted Kingfishers have large heads with bushy crests and spear-shaped bills for catching fish. The females have flashier plumage, which is unusual for birds. Both can be seen perched on exposed branches and snags. If they see potential hunting targets, they will hover, zero in on the prey, and then plunge head first into the water for the kill. They live in fresh water habitats with rivers, lakes and streams.

Kingfishers will excavate a nest burrow in steep banks near water. The female usually lays six or seven eggs in a grass or leaf saucer in the burrow.



LENGTH: 15.5"
WINGSPAN: 24" ♂ > ♀

American Coot

Fulica americana

Coots can be seen in fresh water lakes, marshes, ponds, and mudflats. Their diet includes aquatic vegetation, algae, tadpoles, snails, worms, and insects.

Coots build their nests in tall vegetation for concealment, constructing a floating cup of dead stems anchored to the plants. They use fine grasses to line the nest, and they usually have a clutch of eight to twelve eggs.