



Globally Important Bird Areas



Camp Pendleton (Santa Margarita River Valley), California

Ornithological Highlight: The scrublands and oak woodlands of the valley support one of the largest remaining populations of the endangered California Gnatcatcher, the 125,000-acre Marine Corps base (Camp Pendleton) alone supports over 600 pairs based on its 1998 Base-wide survey. The Base includes the largest undeveloped section of coastline remaining in Southern California. The base also has an abundant population of Least Bell's Vireo.

Size: 10,000 acres

Location: San Diego County, near Fallbrook

- *Coastal California* (NABCI Bird Conservation Region #32)
- *Central and Southern Calif. Coast and Valleys* (PIF Physiographic Area #90)

Ownership: U.S. Marine Corps; Fallbrook Public Utility District; San Diego State University

Land use: Camp Pendleton is a Marine Corps training facility, with limited public access

Site description: One of the only mostly undammed rivers in Southern California, the Santa Margarita flows largely through steep-sided canyons and has a narrow floodplain, except near its mouth. Its nearly continuous riparian corridor adjoins vast scrublands and some oak woodlands and forms the only connection for many animals between the interior and the coast.

Birds: Ornithologically, the area is highly significant. Besides its importance to the endangered California Gnatcatcher, its extensive riparian corridor provides habitat for up to 900 Least Bell's Vireo, representing up to 50% of the entire breeding population of this endangered subspecies. The natural resources program on the base is very active and successful. It has established a program to trap cowbirds, which are nest parasites of the vireo, and other neotropical migrant birds. The Base conserves the estuary through managing military training use that is compatible with species recovery efforts. Due to successful natural resource management by the base, the estuary and surrounding beach area now support twenty percent of the entire California Least Tern nesting population. The river valley and estuary also serve as a refuge for the Brown Pelican, Western Snowy Plover, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, all endangered or watch-listed species. Other watch-listed species include Nuttall's Woodpecker, Oak Titmouse, and California Thrasher, and the watch-listed Lawrence's Goldfinch is an uncommon resident.

Conservation issues: The main threat to the area is urban development surrounding the base (note: none is planned). Upstream development in the watershed is among the fastest in the U.S. Other potential threats are large development projects planned for off-base portions of the watershed; these could cause large-scale sedimentation into the river and the estuary.

Visitor Information: Camp Pendleton is an active military base much of which is used for training exercises. Most public access to the Base requires specific written permission from the commanding general. This permission is granted only for scientific and educational purposes consistent with the research mission of the base. However, visitors may take a self-guided tour of the Base after receiving a pass at the Main Gate near Oceanside, California.