

THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY JOINT VENTURE
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VISITING HAYWARD SHORELINE INTERPRETIVE CENTER

We are excited to offer guided audio tours of some of the most beautiful locations accessible for travelers, commuters and anyone driving near or around SF Bay. This is our way of letting you know about our partners and their efforts to protect and restore thousands of acres of wetlands in the nine counties surrounding the Bay.

For now our tours take you to four 'learn and listen' locations in the South Bay where you'll find the largest urban wildlife refuge in the US. We also have a tour that is timed for listening while you drive in either direction along Highway 37 in the North Bay which traverses 40,000 acres of both privately and publicly owned protected lands.

This 15-minute tour begins at the Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center in Hayward, CA and includes three "listen-and-learn" locations on site. Your guide is Phil Gordon and your host is Jerry Kay. Directions can be found on our website at www.yourwetlands.org.

Jerry Kay:

Hi I'm Jerry Kay, and welcome to the San Francisco Bay Joint Ventures walking tour series. This is our San Francisco Bay Audio tour stop at the Hayward Interpretative Center, one of four locations where you're invited to get out and experience wetland ecosystems in the South Bay with an informed guide.

Today, you'll meet Phil Gordon, a native of Hayward, and a retired biology teacher who shares his extensive knowledge of natural history of the area, while pointing out the waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife you're likely to see along the Hayward shoreline.

This tour has three intended stops. Stop one is behind the visitor's center. A few hundred yards down the boardwalk trail is stop two. And finally, at the bridge and kiosk along the boardwalk trail is stop number three.

Now, here's your guide, Phil Gordon.

Phil Gordon:

We're on the east side of San Francisco Bay, and some people call this the southern part of the bay. The most southerly would be in San Jose, but we're about halfway between San Jose and San Francisco. The hills to the east of us you'd be into more Livermore Valley and to Tracie. We can cross the bay over the San Mateo Bridge and we're right next to the San Mateo Bridge at this time. This has a history of salt production years ago. Their landings here, Hayward's landing and Johnson's landing, which were transportation spots for grain and products from the agricultural world to the city, supporting San Francisco and the peninsula.

Looking to the south, about six miles away is Coyote Hills is a regional park. Around that are marshes that continue from there to this location, primary pickle weed and the cord grass saltwater marsh, which is the home, of course, of the endangered Clapper Rail, and other species. The saltwater harvest mouse has a preserve right behind us to the east of us, about 80 acres that was given by Cargill years ago.

And so there's salt ponds between us and those Coyote Hills that are now part of the public lands. And in fact, they have been moved up to an even higher category, and that is the Eden Landing Ecological Preserve.

In those ponds, we have wintering birds by the tens of thousands. Last year, I believe it was, we had 6,000 black bellied plovers for the Hayward Fremont Christmas Bird Count. And about 4,000 avocets and about 2,000 black neck stilts. I think there were 100,000 sandpipers, and so this is one of the hottest spots in the whole Bay Area for the productive wildlife habitat.

If we look to the west of us, to the Santa Cruz mountains that are in the horizon and across to Foster City, and San Mateo, between there and here, of course, you get a quarter of a mile walk brings you right to the edge of the San Francisco Bay. And, to the delight of all of us, we now have a trail that goes right along that, and in fact, it's part of the Bay Trail System. There is now a bridge that cross from this location over to the Eden Landing Ecological Preserve as part of the Bay Trail.

So the trail system is fantastic. And within that, of course, there's all of these fabulous marshes, and all the life zones that we can expect of an overriding of diversity of life.

Jerry Kay: I asked Phil what he'd like us to ponder as we walk along this beautiful trail.

Phil Gordon: You know, I knew Lou Crutcher, with the East Bay Regional Park District, before he passed away, and he said something one time that really sums up what I think should be in your mind as you walk out on a shoreline. He said you know, you go out on the Hayward shoreline, it's like stepping off the clock. And it's the wilderness element that is here. And the noise gets less and less the further you walk out on the edge of the bay and you should pay attention to that. And the solitude is there, even though there may be people passing you, whatever, you take the time and look at some small item. The insects are interesting here, there's the smallest butterfly in the United States is here, the pigmy blue. The rabbits are interesting, the jackrabbits that are often running around to be seen.

And once in a while, we have the bad one, the red fox who eats our nice endangered species. But at any rate, there's a lot of things that set your mind to expect, and particularly the feeling that is here to step off the clock.

Jerry Kay: I love that. Step off the clock. Once you've taken in the view from here and feel oriented, we'll get to stop number two. We don't have a specific stopping point, so just head along the trail which leads out to the bay and stop at about 150 yards or so, and then start your audio player to meet up again with Phil Gordon for stop number two.

Jerry Kay: Once you've walked along the trail a few hundred yards from the visitor's center, pause again and take in the view with Phil Gordon.

Phil Gordon: We've walked about one and a half football fields away from the Hayward Shoreline Interpretative Center now on the trail, and we're looking to the north at one of the first large pond areas. We have several hundred sandpipers with four or five of the larger American avocets standing out there gleaming in the sun and just quietly, not really feeding very actively, they're waiting for an exposure.

And we have right in front of us, on this trail, the edge of the trail is lined with the marsh plants that are adapted for saltwater. And there's alkali heath, there's salt grass and there's pickle weed, which merges into another mudflat with a small channel that feeds the water into these from the bay. And another line of pickle weed, until finally we're out to the edge of that pond,

which is from us, maybe about 150 to 200 feet. And we can actually hear the peeping of these sandpipers.

This now is the time of winter, and all of these birds have come down from the arctic where they nest. The avocets nest here on levies, but all those sandpipers are all arctic and subarctic birds.

Now, within the pond, there is a nesting island that exists and some other levies that are quite vegetated. So, birds will be using those as well, either for resting, or in case of those avocets, they like a nice flat levy that they can put a nest down with four or five eggs in it. We are a little too far away to see something like that, but there are places in the long walk where you will be close enough to see avocets on nests.

Jerry Kay: And here I ask Phil to talk about some of the other notable features we can see from this trail, such as the channels you see along the way.

Phil Gordon: The channels are pretty well-designed with various weirs and blocks for tidal control. But the tides do move into this far back from the Bay Shore itself. Those then are controlled to create a simulation of the historic shoreline. As you walk out from this spot to the Bay Shore itself, we pass a series of ponds that are all fenced off, and those affluent ponds that are from the sewage treatment plant that are in the process of being cleared up and cleaned and purified to the point where the public can walk into them.

But they have islands -- nesting bird islands that have produced some incredible records for wildlife in this area. As that water recedes in these channels, it does go to the mud at the bottom. And right now, I'm looking at one of the channels that has sandpipers on that mud. And they've been standing, waiting somewhere else on the upper shoreline edges, until those tide flats are exposed, and they will fly and soon that will be covered with sandpipers.

Right now, the sunlight is on one of the ponds we're looking at to the west. If I look through my binoculars, I could probably identify some of those, and I'll do that. Oh my gosh, well, there's American avocets, and there a lot of sandpipers, probably both western sandpiper and (inaudible) sandpiper. All quietly waiting, that probably isn't the mud they're going to feed most actively on right now. It's a pond that's stable and doesn't have so much of a tidal effect. But they're going to move out of that and they'll come into these other channels that we're speaking of when they get exposed to the mud.

The islands I'm looking at right from and then as I walk further out, some of those were actually enhanced by keeping vegetation off of them and putting crushed shells on them in order to encourage nesting by snowy plover, a fully endangered species that does breed here. When the ducks are here, we'll see a lot of the sea ducks and a lot of the dabbling ducks, a lot of the diving ducks; these channels will then have swimming birds in them. American widgeon, for example, and the pintails and the mallards that have been nesting elsewhere.

Because there are a lot of fish, maybe four or five species right here now. The turns come in and they're flying and they'll be diving into the channels, so there's a lot of action happening just in the channels themselves. The ponds are more stationary, aren't fluctuating so much with the tidal action.

One of the things that birders finally begin doing is listening carefully and beginning to separate the identity of these birds out by sound as well. So that's a whole other dimension, but it's quite an experience as these tides change, if you're out on the very edge of the bay along the trail, the birds begin taking off and flying and you'll see tens of thousands of birds moving from one place to another, which has better strategy for foraging. And the sounds they make; right now these birds that we were looking at, they're just now moving around and it isn't because some hawk is chasing, they know, instinctively, that it's time to move around and get to the forage area. And we'll see them moving out of here pretty soon.

Jerry Kay:

And this gives me a chance to mention that if you visit the Hayward Shoreline frequently, you'll see changes from season to season and from early morning to evening. I asked Phil to talk about how many birds a person might see in this region of the South Bay, of course, depending on the time of year of the visit.

Phil Gordon:

In numbers of different kinds, we see here on a Christmas Bird Count, and this is in winter, in December; 175 or so species of birds. The numbers of them are varied, but this is one of the richest so far as individual numbers is concerned. So, we have the black bellied plover who is a sandpiper-like water bird. We have 6,800 of those last year on the Christmas Bird Count.

A long billed curlew, those number in the order of about 4 or 500, which is very high. The black neck stilts might be 4 to 5,000 of them can be here. And also, the avocets about 2,000. The little sandpipers are in the order to 50 to 100,000. So we get about 130,000 all told. All habitats, not just the Bay Shore.

Jerry Kay: And we definitely saw an incredible diversity of birds on our walk that day with Phil. I hope you're enjoying this walking tour with Phil Gordon. Stop number three is the bridge overlook, which is just another 100 yards or so down the trail. And there you'll join Phil Gordon once again for stop number 3.

Jerry Kay: We've made it to a bridge closer to the bay now for stop number three of the Hayward Shoreline audio tour where Phil continues to point out some of the natural and manmade features here.

Phil Gordon: Well historically, there was a slue here, and now it's been widened and enhanced, and carries the water all the way up to the interpretive center. The important part here, of course, is that the water is breached, is enhanced, and that is the channel is enhanced. Historically, this was one of the primary docks, the Johnson landing in Hayward. You can't help but see these levies, which are obviously artificial, but some of these levies go way back to the late 1800s, early 1900s, when the salt manufacturing became an important industry here.

And in fact, in one of the levies, you can actually see leaning one of the old archimedes screw pumps that was used to move the water from one salt pond to the next as they've dried them out and removed the water by sun -- solar action -- till you finally had enough dry salt to scrape up and put into a pile and put into packages and sell.

And if we walk from the Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center, across the 92 freeway, we can find some more complete structures of that sort, and further down in the Cargill properties, they have some reconstructed totally. But the center does have a little miniature, so children can actually see how this works. It's a very finely built replica of the old archimedes screw pump, as it was called.

The outer levies, where the bay edge hits, are very carefully monitored, and primarily through the East Bay regional park district, who is taken responsibility for that. So, many storms come here and destroy parts of these levies that hold that water where it is. So in the meantime, we don't get all of this marsh being actually washed away. You can actually see the edges of this channel that looked like scalloped, and they actually have eroded in and then are built back out.

Most of the ducks that come here, 8, 9, 10,000, 30,000, are coming from far north, nesting near the arctic and the subarctic. I have to put my binoculars up, because they're too far away for me to identify all of them. But I see northern shoveler, I see ready ducks, I see a pie billed grebe, there are mallards and there are northern pintail. So you can see that there's quite a few different kinds of ducks. And the numbers, if we were to make a really quick estimate, I would guess there's about 4 to 500 ducks that are scattered over there.

The two ponds though have islands within them, there's a double-pond. Both of the islands that I'm looking at were places where very important shorebird nesting takes place, and the turns, the forester's turns nest in this place too.

Jerry Kay: While we're going to end our part of the tour on this bridge overlook, I asked Phil what we can see if we were to continue on the trail.

Phil Gordon: Well, in about three miles, you'll get through the Howard Cogswell Marsh, which was named in honor of Professor Cogswell, who's passed away now. And was actually my mentor. Along that way, you get to walk right along the edge of the bay, looking right directly at the wildlife and clear cross, the great views, Brisbane and South San Francisco and San Mateo.

Along this walk, the two bridges that you cross will have beautiful spectacular views of the mudflats and the birds that will be right there under you. In fact, it's one of the closest view spots to see ready turnstones, and black bellied plovers, and the curlews, and finally you get to mount trashmore, which is the only little low hill out there, was an old garbage dump, and closed in about 1948.

And then finally, up to the parking lot for the Hayward Regional Shoreline, run by the East Bay Regional Park District.

Jerry Kay: And Phil tells me that the whole walk is about a six-mile roundtrip, which I highly encourage you to take. I want to thank Phil Gordon for being our outstanding guide. We do have other audio tours for you produced by the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture, just visit yourwetlands.org and then click on audio tours. Thank you very much. I'm Jerry Kay.

EXTRAS

HOW FAR DO BIRDS TRAVEL?

Jerry Kay: Just in general, these birds may have travelled hundreds, thousands of miles to get here?

Phil Gordon: The birds that come here, that come from the subarctic and arctic, not just those directions, some are coming from further east to the prairie providences of Canada, Alberta and Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The prairie potholes it's sometimes called. And those are great producers of many ducks, several species and thousands upon thousands of them. And then on up into the subarctic, particularly for our ducks. And they come here after this incredible flight, which is primarily diurnal when a lot of our animals are nocturnal migrants, but the ducks and the gulls and the swallows, there's several that are diurnal migrants.

Going all that distance, it means they're going in the daytime and not nighttime. Just imagine all the shorebirds are all flying here by the starts. You look out there and you see a whole flat of sandpipers, like (inaudible) sandpipers or western sandpipers, and realize that they have flown here all the way from seven or eight thousand miles to get here at night. And rested, feed, during the daytime, and then on they come every night for about 5 to 600 miles per night.

GREAT BLUE HERON

Phil Gordon

One of the common birds that we find out here is the Great Blue Heron, which is half your height, or maybe more or less. And this guy, which is (inaudible), he's rather dull in color, not bright white in the front, so he was born this year. And he might have been born on one of the old duck hunting lodges that still exist, even though it's in the national wildlife refuge, the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

He wasn't born around here, because there's no trees, no place to put a big nest. They can put them on a power pole, but none of these have those on them. There's too many ravens that would chase them off anyway or eat the babies. So, here he is and he's holding still and looking like a pose for a statue, but he -- his eyes are looking for movement on the surface of the water of fish. We see them up in the hills too when they're catching gophers and snakes, lizards, whatever. They're really an opportunistic feeder.

But when he stretches those wings out, why, big black primaries and secondaries against the grey and that long bill, it's quite a spectacular thing to see.

EXTRA EQUIPMENT TO BRING

Phil Gordon

My equipment when I walk out here, I carry a pair of binoculars, I use a harness so that I don't get what's called birder's neck by hanging the binoculars for hours and hours, which will happen eventually. And the spotting scope, I didn't have one for a long time, and I got that and here where the distances are great, but the air is fairly clear, not too many heat waves why I'm zoomed up to 60-power a good part of the time, or maybe 45-power on that. And that I now can photograph through with my little camera. So the camera is another item to bring with you.

But the binocular, the spotting scope maybe, and a camera is about all you need. It isn't a bad idea to carry an identification field guide to all the birds, after all, if there's 100 species out here, you need a field guide to help you. And some look quite similar, one to the other.