

Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Rambler Trail Guide

Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge
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*Trail descriptions written by Clyde Morris.
Photograph by Karen Hollingsworth*

AMERICA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES...
where wildlife comes naturally!



Notes

2008 Schedule

June 28	Coyote Creek Lagoon 2 Fremont, 5.5 miles roundtrip 9:00 a.m.
July 26	Mallard Slough 4 Alviso, 5.5-mile loop 9:30 a.m.
August 9	Stevens Creek East Trail 6 Mountain View, 3 miles roundtrip 9:00 a.m.
August 30	Ravenswood 8 Menlo Park, 5-mile loop 9:00 a.m.
September 13	Shoreline Trail 10 Fremont, 8 miles roundtrip 9:00 a.m.
September 27	Alviso Slough 12 Alviso, 9-mile loop 9:00 a.m.
October 18	LaRiviere Marsh/ Tidelands Trail 14 Fremont, 2-mile loop 1:00 p.m.



Coyote Creek Lagoon

Saturday, June 28 9:00 a.m.

5 miles roundtrip

Highlights: Fall through spring, this is one of the best trails on the Alameda County portion of the refuge for viewing, photographing, and studying water birds. Up to 35 species of birds can be seen on an hour-long walk. More species can be seen using binoculars and a spotting scope and/or on longer walks. Hidden behind a business park, it is the perfect place to get away from urban congestion.

Uses Permitted: Walking & bicycling only; dogs not permitted.

Trail Conditions: Compacted gravel levee. ADA compatible from south parking lot trailhead only.

Introduction: Coyote Creek Lagoon was created in 1986 as a 220-acre mitigation project for the business park next to the south parking lot on Fremont Blvd. The lagoon was excavated to provide fill for the business park and then connected to Coyote Creek and Mud Slough to provide wetland habitat for wildlife. It has been monitored yearly since 1986, forming one of the longest continuous monitoring data sets of a San Francisco Bay wetland mitigation project. The lagoon is tidal and is surrounded by brackish marsh. The trail is on an elevated flood control levee separating Coyote Creek Lagoon from a business park flood control basin. Plans call for connecting this trail to the Bay Trail within a few years.

Trail Details: The first 0.1 mile takes you along a flood control channel toward the refuge boundary. View tidal wetlands being constructed across the channel along Coyote Creek. These would-be wetlands are part of a mitigation project and are proposed to become part of the refuge.

For the next 0.3 miles, the trail is sandwiched between Coyote Creek and a pickleweed marsh dubbed the Mouse Pasture. This section of the creek is used by endangered steelhead and Coho salmon in their migration to the Bay and the ocean. Across Coyote Creek is a favorite of the South Bay gull population, the Newby Island Landfill.

The Mouse Pasture provides habitat for the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse. It also houses nesting black-necked stilts and American avocets in the summer.

Venturing forward, you will come across a fork in the trail. Going straight brings you to a fishing spot popular with those dreaming of catching striped bass and sturgeon. Veering right will bring you between Coyote Creek Lagoon and the business park storm water retention basin. Both offer great water bird viewing. Depending on the tide and the time of year, there are excellent views of ducks, shorebirds, coots, gulls, egrets, herons, pelicans, cormorants, grebes, raptors, song sparrows, common yellowthroats, and many others.

After 2.1 miles you reach another junction. The left trail takes you over a railroad railcar bridge over Mud Slough with views of the back side of the lagoon. The right trail leads you to the north trailhead parking lot and another 0.4 mile toward the Fremont Blvd. entrance. This section of trail has upland bird species such as ring-necked pheasant, house finch and mockingbirds. Rest at the picnic tables in the small city park before your return hike along the lagoon. Or, you can head out onto Fremont Blvd. and walk the 1.5 miles back to your car at the south parking lot.



American Avocet

Directions to Trailhead: The south trailhead can be reached by taking the South Fremont Blvd/Cushing Pkwy exit from I-880 in Fremont. Drive south on Fremont Blvd. until it dead ends. There is a parking lot on the right next to 48481 Fremont Blvd. Meet in the parking lot.



Mallard Slough

Saturday, July 26 9:30 a.m.
5.5-mile loop

Highlights: This trail passes through a variety of wildlife habitats, provides views of the refuge's ghost town, Drawbridge, and connects with the Alviso Slough Trail making a 14-mile hike possible. It makes an excellent bike ride.

Uses Permitted: Walking & bicycling; dogs are prohibited. During the waterfowl hunting season (mid October - late January), a 3.8 mile section of trail is closed from the water control structure along Mallard Slough to the railroad crossing to Alviso Slough Trail.

Trail Conditions: Flat, compacted dirt levee. Trail turns to mud after rain. Strong winds are common in the summer afternoons.

Trail Details: Once reaching the levee overlooking the pond named A16, Mallard Slough is on your right. Mallard Slough is tidal and provides views of shorebirds on mudflats at low tide and ducks at high tide. Pond A16 have large numbers of ducks, cormorants, and pelicans in the winter, shorebirds in the spring and fall, and terns in the summer. Egrets, herons and gulls are found year-round. At 0.2 miles from the trailhead, there is a water control structure that allows water movement between the pond and the slough during low and high tides. Before this structure was built in 2005, this pond had been part of Cargill's salt production process for 60 years.

This first part of Mallard Slough is dominated by bulrush indicating that freshwater feeds into the slough. The common yellowthroat and Alameda song sparrow, both species of concern in the State of California, breed here. It is also a great place to listen to the frantic song of the marsh wren, a feisty bundle of energy not found in true salt marshes.

For the next 0.5 mile, you pass a section of the slough great for seeing black-crowned night herons, great and snowy egrets and great blue herons. In the summer, this section of the pond has many families of mallards and gadwall.

At 1.8 miles from the trailhead, one of five mud islands in Pond A16 is visible. This island provides bird nesting habitat in the summer and roosting habitat in the winter. In the summer, nesting American avocets, Forster's terns and an occasional black skimmer are fascinating to watch. American white pelicans and a variety of gulls also loaf on the island.

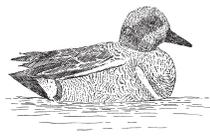


Great Blue Heron

At the junction of Mallard Slough and Coyote Creek you can look across Coyote Creek to the levee breach of Pond A20. This former salt pond is restored to tidal action in 2005. At 2.5 miles from the trailhead, you can see some of the fading structures that once made up the town Drawbridge. It was formed when the railroad was built in 1876. Railroad workers, fishermen, hunters and vacationers stayed here. Hotels and bars were especially popular during the prohibition years. Because of high train traffic, no one is allowed to walk on the tracks. This is strictly enforced.

The last 1.5 miles of the trail is set between A16 and New Chicago Marsh. This marsh has subsided 10 feet below sea level. Pickleweed for the salt marsh harvest mouse is maintained by allowing small amounts of salt water from Coyote Creek into the marsh each summer. This marsh also provides habitat for nesting black-necked stilts, Forster's terns, and ducks. At 5.4 miles, you reach the New Chicago Marsh boardwalk which leads back to the parking lot.

Directions to Trailhead: From Highway 880 or Highway 101, exit on Highway 237 toward Mountain View/Alviso. Exit on Zanker Rd. and turn north. Continue on Zanker Rd. to the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge entrance (a sharp right turn at Grand Blvd.). Meet in front of the Environmental Education Center.



Stevens Creek East

Saturday, Aug 9 9:00 a.m.

3 miles roundtrip

Highlights: This trail follows Stevens Creek and passes ponds with large concentrations of water birds in the winter. It is one of the few access points on the refuge to the bay shoreline.

Uses Permitted: Walking & bicycling only; dogs are prohibited.

Trail Conditions: Flat, compacted dirt/gravel levee. Strong winds are common in the summer afternoons.

Trail Details: Just past the brown metal gate is the best area for birds that prefer fresher water such as mallards, green-winged teals, cinnamon teals and possibly blue-winged teals. The creek is important habitat for steelhead, a federally-listed fish. Soon you will arrive at the footbridge that crosses Stevens Creek to the Shoreline Park at Mountain View with its own extensive trail system. Stay on the levee and continue north to remain on the Stevens Creek East Trail. To the right is a seasonal wetland owned by Mid Peninsula Open Space District. Depending on the season, this area may contain waterfowl and shorebirds when wet, and western meadowlarks, house finch, and killdeer when dry. Scan the PG&E towers along the trail for nesting ravens and double-crested cormorants, and perching peregrine falcons, red-tailed hawks and white-tailed kites.

The refuge begins at the kiosk welcoming you to the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Refuge Pond A2E is on the right and Pond A2W on the other side of the creek is to the left. These ponds were purchased from Cargill as part of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. The numbers of ducks using these ponds have increased over 100% after the ponds had been retrofitted.

From late fall through early spring, these ponds are filled with ducks including northern shoveler, American wigeon, bufflehead, greater and lesser scaup, mallard, ruddy duck, gadwall, common goldeneye,

northern pintail and even a few redheads and Eurasian wigeon. In the fall, this is the best location accessible to the public to see endangered least terns. After breeding in Alameda Point, the adults take their young to these ponds to improve their flying and fishing techniques before spending the winter in Mexico and points further south. Other water birds found include American white pelican, American coot, double-crested cormorant, and eared grebe.

The ponds to the right of the trail are open to waterfowl hunting from existing hunting blinds on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from mid-October through late January. The trail remains open throughout the hunting season.

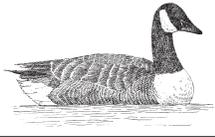
Near the end of the trail, Forster's terns and American avocets nest on the small island in the pond during the summer. The refuge hopes to restore some of these ponds back to tidal wetlands to increase habitat for these endangered species. More information on these restoration efforts can be found on <http://www.southbayrestoration.org>.

At 1.5 miles you reach the end of the trail at the shoreline of the bay. At high tide in the winter, you see many bay ducks such as canvasback and surf scoters.

At low tide during the spring and fall migrations, and in the winter, this is a great spot to see large numbers of shorebirds including willet, marbled godwit, semipalmated plover, western and least sandpipers, dowitchers and dunlin. This is the best place in county to see red knots.



Directions to Trailhead: The trailhead is reached from the end of Crittenden Ln. in Mountain View or from Shoreline Park's Stevens Creek West Trail. From Highway 101, take the Shoreline Blvd. exit and drive north 0.9 miles toward the Shoreline Amphitheater to Crittenden Ln. Turn right on Crittenden Ln. and drive 0.4 miles until the road ends. Walk past the sign for A&Z Tree Movers and up to the Stevens Creek levee to the paved trail on the west side of the creek. Cross the bridge to the east side of the creek and turn left. Meet at the brown metal gate.



Ravenswood

Saturday, Aug 30 9:00 a.m.
5-mile loop

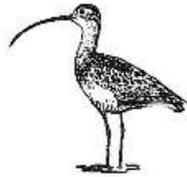
Highlights: This little used trail traverses the greatest variety of habitat types for the distance hiked: tidal slough, tidal marsh, bay shoreline, seasonal salt ponds and muted tidal pond. During winter when birding is best, the seasonal, former salt ponds support thousands to tens of thousands of birds depending on the size of the pond. The Mosely Tract, owned by the City of San Jose, provides some of the best birding along the route.

Uses Permitted: Walking & bicycling; dogs are prohibited. During waterfowl hunting season (mid October – late January), trail is closed to all use except waterfowl hunters and their retrieval dogs.

Trail Conditions: Flat, compacted dirt levee. Trail turns into mud after rain. Strong winds are common in the summer.

Trail Details: Starting at the metal gate, hike the levee trail between the seasonal salt ponds on the left and a tidal pond on the right. The tidal pond called the Mosely Tract can hold large flocks of ducks, up to 12 species, during the winter at high tide. Caspian and Forster's terns can be seen in the summer. Gulls, double-crested cormorants and both American white and California brown pelicans can be seen in the proper season feeding on fish. At lower tides, shorebirds take over feeding along the muddy shoreline.

During wet winters, the salt ponds on the left provide habitat for waterfowl such as northern shoveler, bufflehead, scaup, and ruddy ducks. Lower water levels during the spring and fall migrations bring large flocks of shorebirds including phalaropes, plovers, dowitchers, western and least sandpipers, dunlin, willet, marbled godwits and long-billed curlews. In the summer, the ponds can contain nesting snowy plovers and American avocets.



Long-billed Curlew

As you continue on the trail, the Mosley Tract is replaced with the Bay shoreline. Bay ducks such as scaup, canvasback, and scoters dive with cormorants and grebes. The peacefulness of this little used section of the bay surrounded by views of the East Bay and northern reaches of the Santa Cruz Mountain is a treat.

At 1.8 miles, the bay shoreline gives way at the mouth of the tidal Ravenswood Slough. The tidal slough and marsh are good places to look for northern harriers, egrets, and herons. The tidal marsh is home to two endangered species, the California clapper rail and salt marsh harvest mouse that are found only in San Francisco Bay. The Alameda song sparrow and common yellowthroat, species of concern in California, can also be found here. Along this section of trail, evidence of the salt making process lingers in the form of old tide gates, siphons, pumps and power lines. Some of these structures date back to the 1940s when many of these ponds were built.



Song Sparrow

To the left continues to be the seasonal salt ponds. You can see the former tidal slough channels containing water when the rest of the pond is dry. Nesting avocets and plovers tend to be found here in greater numbers than along other sections of the trail.

When you reach the metal gate at the west trailhead, walk the 0.6 miles along the road to return to your car.

Directions to Trailhead: The trailhead is marked with a brown metal gate and refuge signs, just west of the Dumbarton Bridge on the north side of Highway 84. **From the East Bay,** cross the Dumbarton Bridge and exit at the Ravenswood Unit sign. Drive east 0.3 miles on the frontage road to the eastern trailhead. **From the West (Menlo Park),** drive Highway 84 toward the Dumbarton Bridge, exit at the Ravenswood Unit sign and drive east on the frontage road. Cross under the bridge and back west to the eastern trailhead for a total of 0.6 miles. * Park in the designated parking spaces just past the trailhead. Meet at the brown metal gate.



Shoreline Trail

Saturday, Sept 13 9:00 a.m.
8 miles roundtrip

Highlights: It is a perfect place to get away from the congestion of our urban community to enjoy wildlife viewing and sweeping views across the bay to San Francisco and San Mateo County. Depending on the height of the tide, the entire length of the North Shoreline Trail can offer close views of feeding shorebirds on the bay's mudflats and bay ducks in the deeper waters.

Uses Permitted: Walking and bicycling only; dogs not permitted.

Trail Conditions: Compacted dirt levee. Trail can be extremely muddy after rain. Strong winds are common in the summer afternoons.

Trail Details: The trail begins with 1.25 miles of riprap shoreline which then gives way to Ideal Marsh, a small tidal salt marsh. At 2.5 miles from the trailhead, the Shoreline Trail connects with an unnamed trail we call No Name Trail. This 1.3 mile trail goes east directly to the Coyote Hills Regional Park. Continuing on the Shoreline Trail for two additional miles brings you to the Alameda Creek Trail. You may turn around and backtrack toward the refuge, or explore East Bay Regional Park's Alameda Creek Trail and Coyote Hills Park.

In the summer, as you approach the trailhead, look for the mud nests of cliff swallows attached to the south side of the Dumbarton Bridge. As the levee trail begins, one of the best shorebird viewing areas in the refuge is just to your right in the corner of the salt pond. Small mud islands are favored by wintering and migrating shorebirds for roosting at high tide. At the height of spring and fall migration, hundreds of birds pack this small island including willets, marbled godwits, sanderling, western and least sandpipers, ruddy turnstones, and occasionally red knots. Care should be taken not to approach too closely and disturb the resting birds.

Endangered California clapper rails and salt marsh harvest mice live in Ideal Marsh. An occasional Alameda song sparrow, a species of

special concern in California can be sighted there. The salt ponds adjacent to the northernmost section of the Shoreline Trail attract many fish-eating birds such as terns, cormorants and brown and American white pelicans.

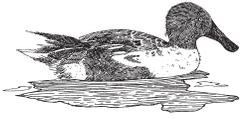
In the late summer, the endangered California least terns feed in these ponds. After nesting in Alameda near the Oakland Bay Bridge, the adults use these ponds to teach the younger birds how to perfect their hunting techniques. Ducks such as northern shoveler, ruddy ducks and gadwall are seen in the winter. During the summer, thousands of California gulls nest along the levees with smaller numbers of Caspian terns.



Western Sandpiper

Other Notes of Interest: In the spring of 1991, a 35-foot long gray whale washed into Ideal Marsh. Portions of this whale's backbone and baleen are on display in the Visitor Center. In the fall of 2005, a lone Chilean flamingo was recorded using the salt ponds.

Directions to Trailhead: The trailhead is at the Dumbarton Fishing Pier parking lot, three miles past the Visitor Center on Marshlands Rd. From Highway 84 on the east side of the Dumbarton Bridge in Fremont, take the Thornton Ave. exit. Drive 0.6 miles south on Thornton Ave. and turn right onto Marshlands Rd. Follow Marshlands Rd. until it dead ends into the Dumbarton Fishing Pier parking lot. Look for the "Shoreline Trail" sign on a chain-link fence under the Dumbarton Bridge and meet the group here.



Alviso Slough

Saturday, Sept 27 9:00 a.m.
9-mile loop

Highlights: 10,000 ducks! (This trail skirts along the salt ponds that host the largest quantity of waterbirds found on the refuge.) And solitude! By the time the trail meets Coyote Creek at Mile 4.0, you are far from human development.

Uses Permitted: Walking & bicycling; dogs are prohibited.

Trail Conditions: Flat, compacted dirt levee. Trail turns to mud with rain. Strong winds are common in the summer afternoons.

Trail Details: From the metal gate, walk 0.1 mile to the viewing platform. The platform overlooks the former Alviso Marina (now vegetated), Salt Pond A12, and New Chicago Marsh across the Union Pacific Railroad track. From the platform, turn left (west) away from the railroad track. Soras and Virginia rails are present in the vegetated marina all year except the summer, and marsh wrens are present year-round.

At 1.4 miles you reach the levee separating Pond A12 and Pond A11. This upper end of Alviso Slough is dominated by fresh/brackish vegetation such as cattails and bulrush. The slough has nesting marsh wrens, common yellowthroats and black-crowned night-herons. The trail itself has mourning doves and wintering savanna sparrows. The managed salt ponds provide habitat for numerous waterbirds including double-crested cormorants, pied-billed and Clark's grebes, Forster's (more common in spring) and Caspian terns and American white and brown pelicans. At the next levee junction, the levee separating Ponds A11 and A10 often serves as resting areas for great and snowy egrets, great blue herons, gulls, terns, ducks, and pelicans. Double-crested cormorants and California gulls would often nest there in the spring.

Pond A9 is reached 3.7 miles from the viewing platform. Pond A9 has the largest number of wintering ducks of any of the 53 salt ponds in South San Francisco Bay; sometimes exceeding 10,000

individuals. Northern shoveler, bufflehead, ruddy duck, scaup, and gadwall are the most common. At the 4-mile mark, you see the A9 water control structure, the first of three on the trail. These structures allow water movement between the pond and the slough during low and high tides, thereby decreasing the salinity levels and increasing food prey. Before this structure was built in 2005, this pond had been part of Cargill's salt production process for 60 years. Since its installation, duck use has increased by 100%, and shorebird use has increased by more than 100%.



Brown Pelican

The ponds you encounter for the next three miles (A14 and A15) also have waterfowl and fish-eating birds. At low tides, shorebirds such as marbled godwits, long-billed curlews, sandpipers, and dowitchers can be seen foraging in Coyote Creek over the vegetated marsh. The tidal marsh has nesting northern harriers and song sparrows. As you approach the railroad track, distant views of the ghost town Drawbridge can be seen.

Pond A13 comes into view two miles later. This pond, along with Pond A12 and A14 are managed for higher salinities so brine shrimp and brine flies can thrive. These critters are essential prey for shrimp/fly-loving species. As a result, Ponds A12, A13, and A15 are best for sighting pied-billed and eared grebes, and Wilson's and red-necked phalaropes.

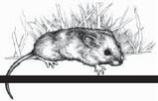
Mile 7 brings you to the legal crossing of the railroad track. Crossing the track will connect you to the Mallard Slough Trail. Mile 9 brings you back to the trailhead and the Alviso Marina viewing platform, picnic tables and restrooms.

Directions to Trailhead: The trailhead is at the Alviso Marina in Alviso. From Highway 237, exit at Lafayette/Gold St. Head north onto the Gold St. Connector and left onto Gold St. Turn left onto Elizabeth St. and right onto Hope St., which leads you to the Alviso Marina. Meet in the picnic table area adjacent to the restrooms.

LaRiviere Marsh/Tidelands Trail

Saturday, Oct 18 1:00 p.m.

2-mile loop



Highlights: LaRiviere Marsh Trail leads through tidal salt marsh which was restored from a commercial salt crystallizer bed. This trail is probably the best place on the refuge to view the endangered California clapper rail as it comes out at low tide to feed in the muddy slough channels. Tidelands Trail provides a good introduction to the tidal marshes and salt ponds of the refuge.

Uses Permitted: Walking. Bicycling and dogs are prohibited on LaRiviere Marsh Trail. Bicycling and dog walking (dogs permitted on a 6' leash) are permitted on Tidelands Trail.

Trail Conditions: Compacted dirt levee, wooden boardwalk, and hard packed gravel.

Trail Details: This walk combines two trails. We begin with the 0.5-mile LaRiviere Marsh Trail and conclude with Tidelands Trail. LaRiviere Marsh Trail crosses through a restored tidal marsh via a boardwalk to a historic salt pond levee. Follow the levee and walk past the historic salt works structures to Marshlands Rd. Once on Marshlands Rd., head west for a short distance, cross the road, and pick up the Tidelands Trail via the Harrier Spur Trail.

Year-around residents for this area are great and snowy egrets, northern harriers, white-tailed kites, American kestrels and red-tailed hawks. During the fall, winter, and spring, many species of shorebirds including Western and least sandpipers, black-necked stilts, American avocets, dowitchers, and greater yellowlegs feed in the open water marsh ponds. During the winter, ducks such as mallards, gadwall and occasionally a canvasback are easily observed. Also common in the winter in the parking lot area are golden-crowned and white-crowned sparrows, California towhees and yellow-rumped warblers. Western meadowlarks, black phoebe and Anna's hummingbird are also possible.

Historical Interests on LaRiviere Marsh Trail: For 50 years, these

levees surrounded dry ponds filled with thick layers of salt. From the 1920s to the late 1970s, this site was used as a crystallizer pond where bay waters would evaporate, leaving the salt behind. The salt was scraped up and piled in a tall stack which today is an open water pond adjacent to Thornton Ave. The levee next to the metal water control structure once supported a railroad used to transport the salt to markets. Remnants of old metal and redwood pipes, wooden walls, dug out channels, and wooden locks left over from the salt production days can still be seen along the trail. This marsh is named for Florence and Philip LaRiviere in 1997 to honor their leadership in the group Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge which helped establish the refuge and protect South San Francisco Bay wildlife habitat.

Upon reaching Marshlands Rd., head west a short distance and cross the road to connect to Tidelands Trail. At the junction, turn left and follow the trail. Crumbling cement steps and tall agave plants are all that remain of the public park former landowner August Schilling (of Schilling Spices fame) tried to establish on the south end of this hill. This is an excellent place to examine the chert and serpentinite rocks. Headquarters Hill, along with those in Coyote Hills Regional Park, are the only natural hills along the South San Francisco Bay shoreline.

Head toward the footbridge and cross over Newark Slough. Mud from the salt pond had been piled on the banks of the levee to prevent further erosion from the waves created by wind. The mud will be graded after it dries, about two years from now. Next, head north toward the other footbridge, cross the bridge, and take the trail directing you to the visitor center. Once in the main parking lot, you may now cross the road back to the LaRiviere Marsh parking lot to your car.

Directions to Trailhead: The trailhead is at the LaRiviere Marsh Trailhead Parking Lot. From Highway 84 on the east side of the Dumbarton Bridge in Fremont, take the Thornton Ave. exit. Drive 0.6 miles south on Thornton Ave. to the first road on the right; Marshlands Road. Follow Marshlands Road 0.3 miles to the first paved parking lot on the right. Turn right into the parking lot. Meet at this parking lot. You've gone too far if you get to a stop sign with the Visitor Center parking lot.