



Globally Important Bird Areas



Vandenberg Air Force Base, California

Ornithological Highlights: Important breeding area for Western Snowy Plover and California Least Tern, in addition to several resident and/or breeding Watch List birds

Location: coast near Lompoc, Santa Barbara County

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

Size: 98,600 acres

Ownership: Department of Defense: U.S. Air Force

Habitats: Grassland, fresh and salt marshes, estuary, chaparral, coastal sage scrub and dune scrub, Bishop pine forest and oak woodlands, riparian forest [also sand beach and rocky shoreline]

Land use: Military base

Site description: With a great variety of coastal and upland habitats, Vandenberg represents an important island of natural habitat surrounded by development. Several rare and endangered plant species are found on the base. A site for space and missile launches, its military mission means that much of the base is not open to visitors.

Birds: Up to 250 breeding and nearly 500 wintering Western Snowy Plover have been found on the base, as have up to 120 breeding California Least Tern. *[note: current numbers of Snowy Plovers declined drastically following the 1997-98 El Nino, but recovery appears to be occurring with over 200 breeding birds observed in 2002]*. Among the common wintering or migrant shorebirds and waterfowl are Brant, Long-billed Curlew, Black Turnstone, Short-billed Dowitcher and Heerman's Gull, while Mountain Plover and Black Oystercatcher are rare. Allen's Hummingbird is a common breeding species, while Black-chinned Sparrow, Lawrence's Goldfinch and the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher are rare breeding species. Common residents include Nuttall's Woodpecker, California Thrasher and Oak Titmouse; Bell's Sage Sparrow is resident, with up to 325 pairs breeding on the base; up to 100 pairs of Tricolored Blackbird breed there, with as many as 400 birds wintering.

Conservation issues: Non-native invasive plants are a problem; ice plant, veldt and European beach grass are increasing, but Pampas grass is under control and a restoration plan is being developed to eradicate ice plant and European beach grass from snowy plover nesting areas. Staff biologists cooperate with La Purisima Audubon Society in developing and maintaining a system of ponds designated as the Waterfowl Natural Resource Area. Grazing, formerly allowed on 60,000 acres, has been reduced to 23,000 acres, with cattle excluded from wetlands and oak woodlands.

Visitor information: Much of the base is closed to visitors, but the Santa Ynez River estuary is open to the public via Ocean Park. Barka Slough, an extensive riparian area, can be seen from San Antonio Road East, also open to visitors. For further information, contact 30 CES/CEVPN, Natural Resources, 806 13th St., Suite 116, Vandenberg AFB, CA 93437-5242, tel. 805-605-8399. Access to the Waterfowl Natural Resources Area, maintained by La Purisima Audubon Society, is also available on a limited, advance-reservation basis by calling 30 SFS/SFOW, the 30th Security Forces Fish and Wildlife office, at 805-606-6804. Beach access is limited during the snowy plover nesting season (1 March through 30 September); for current status call 30 SFS/SFOW at the above number.