

Birding Sites between OC and Lone Pine

When I go to Lone Pine, I take the 91 to I-15 and then over the Cajon Pass to Hwy 395 and on up. Others take I-5 through LA to the 14, reaching Hwy 395 near Inyokern. Here are some birding sites along the I-15 route that you might visit on your way either to or from Lone Pine.

Mormon Rocks

Just west of I-15 are some geologically interesting rock formations that Trekkies will recall as filming locations for some of the episodes of the original Star Trek. Nesting in holes in the rocks over the past few years have been Barn Owl, Peregrine Falcon, and Prairie Falcon. Exit from I-15 at Hwy 138 (exit #131) and go left toward Wrightwood. On the left in a mile or so is a fire station that makes a convenient place to park and observe the rocks on the opposite side of Hwy 138.

Hwy 395 (Adelanto to Randsburg)

Watch for Prairie Falcon and Golden Eagle virtually anywhere as you travel the desert stretches of Hwy 395.

Randsburg

This little almost-ghost town has long been a great place to find Chukars. About a mile after you cross the line into Kern County from San Bernardino County, turn left on Randsburg Road and go a mile to the town. Look for Chukar in town and on the hillsides to the south. Try Burma Road. Unfortunately, eBird shows no reports of Chukar at Randsburg for the past few years.

Hwy 395 (Randsburg to Lone Pine)

Bell's Sparrows (formerly "Sage Sparrow") are scattered thinly through this desert countryside. Watch for them at any point you make a stop. North of Little Lake is an intriguing geological feature called Fossil Falls with a well-marked exit off Hwy 395. It's off the highway by a mile (of slow road), followed by a half-mile hike. And just north of Fossil Falls is the Coso Junction rest stop where I have had Bell's Sparrows in the past.

Dirty Socks Springs

This is a freshwater spring at the edge of Owens Lake. It is surrounded by desert in all directions, so it is very popular with bird life. From Hwy 395 at Olancho, take Hwy 190 east for 4.5 miles. On the left, you will see an industrial-looking area with a boxy yellowish building. Go past this complex by two tenths of a mile. Just as the road is making a slight bend to the left, look closely for a left turn onto an obscure gravel road. This road leads north a half mile or so directly to Dirty Socks Springs. You'll know you are there when you smell the dirty socks odor of the sulfury water. When you leave, go back to the industrial building and turn right. In a few hundred feet there will be some interpretive panels on the left. You can then continue out onto a zig-zagging series of levees that will lead you across the southern tip of Owens Lake. These levees will lead you several miles back to Hwy 395 where you can continue north to Lone Pine.

Butterbredt Springs

This is by far the most famous birding location between OC and Lone Pine, but it is off Hwy 14 rather than Hwy 395. Despite the fact that this water hole in the middle of the desert draws great birds, I do not bird there (anymore) because the dirt access road is too bumpy for me (or at least for my car). For further information, including detailed directions, see this webpage from Kern Audubon:

http://www.kern.audubon.org/Butterbredt_birding.htm

For folks with an interest in geology, I recommend “Geology Underfoot: Death Valley and Owens Valley” by R.P Sharp and A.F. Glazner, (Mountain Press Publishing Co., 1997). It explains a number of features that one drives by traveling the northern part of Hwy 395.

Vic Leipzig
March 2023