

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve

— Carol Leigh

WHEN TO GO

Late fall, winter, early spring during a high tide

WHAT TO BRING

The longest lens you have for photographing the birds
Polarizing filter
Tripod

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Bolsa Chica Conservancy
3842 Warner Ave.
Huntington Beach, CA 92649
(714) 846-1114

Amigos de Bolsa Chica
16531 Bolsa Chica St.
Suite 312
Huntington Beach, CA 92649
(714) 840-1575

On the Internet:
www.amigosdebolsachica.org



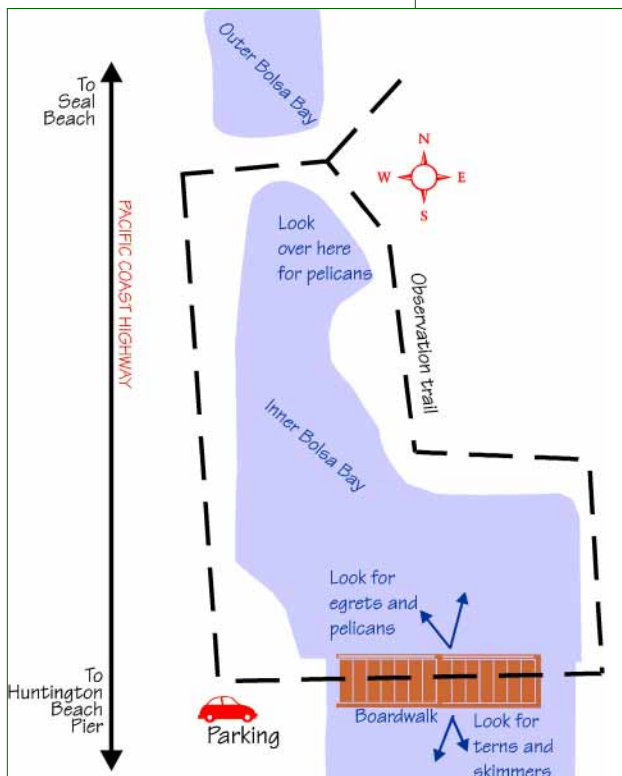
If your lens isn't long enough to fill your frame with just the bird, consider taking shots of the bird in its environment.

When I first began in photography, this was one of my favorite spots for photographing birds. It's not easy, however! You need relatively long lenses — in the 400mm range and longer — to fill your frame with most of the birds. They're simply way too far away for you to create dramatic photographs with any lens shorter than 400mm. That being said, however, you can take decent photos at Bolsa Chica with a 300mm lens if you are

lucky enough to find them closer to you or if you can find very large birds (such as great blue herons, great egrets, pelicans, etc.) to work on, or if you can find masses of birds (such as a flock of skimmers or terns or dowitchers) to fill your frame.

The terns, gulls, and skimmers move quickly, forcing you to be able to pan with the action, predict the action, focus quickly, and meter immediately. Not the easiest photography in the world!

The photo possibilities here, however, are many, ranging from dramatic silhouettes of birds against the water, pure white terns against a blue sky, rafts of ruddy ducks off in the distance, and brown pelicans diving into the water up by the dam. Great blue herons and egrets stalk their prey along the shoreline,





and occasionally an osprey flies past. Down in the water small sharks and rays often cruise past, very visible in the clear water.

There are two main locations for photography. You can stop at the Bolsa Chica Interpretive Center, located on Warner Avenue, just east of Pacific Coast Highway, to learn about the birds in the area and to take the short pathway that leads you along Outer Bolsa Bay. But most photographers

tend to gravitate to the boardwalk and observation trails that begin at the Inner Bolsa Bay, which is located on Pacific Coast Highway, south of Warner Avenue. The first location is good for information and overviews; the second is better for photography.

If you want to make sure the birds are as close to you as possible, plan your visit during a high tide, where the rising waters force most of the shorebirds closer to the walking trails; during a low tide they'll be out farther and more difficult for you to shoot. The entire walk around Inner Bolsa Bay is just 1.5 miles long and is flat.

The boardwalk is a great place to set up your camera and tripod, but be aware that every person that crosses it will make the structure bounce up and down — not the best situation for photography! Often, however, white pelicans will cruise the bay, headed right toward you, rising above and over you at the last minute to cross the boardwalk before cruising back down to sea level as they continue their journey. It's tough photography, but very cool to see!

Birds you can generally find at Bolsa Chica: Belding's savannah sparrow, great blue herons, snowy egrets, white and brown pelicans, black-necked stilts, avocets, ruddy ducks, red-breasted mergansers, lesser scaups, terns, snowy plovers, grebes, black skimmers, dunlins, and dowitchers. Best times to visit for photography are late fall, winter, and early spring.



This tern feels fairly safe!

Although most photographers are interested in the birds at Bolsa Chica, there are a few plants that grow there that can be good for photography, including pickleweed and saltwort.

For additional information, contact the Bolsa Chica Interpretive Center at 3842 Warner Avenue in Huntington Beach; (714) 846-1114. The Center is open Tuesday-Friday from 10 to 4; often on weekends. Free guided tours are offered the first Saturday of the month by the Amigos de Bolsa Chica; call (714) 987-7003.

Birds at Bolsa Chica and when to expect them

All year

Pied-billed grebes, double-crested cormorants, black-crowned night herons, mallards, turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks, kestrels, coots, semipalmated plovers, killdeer, black-

necked stilts and American avocets, willets, sanderlings, sandpipers, short- and long-billed dowitchers, bulls, terns, Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds, black phoebes, crows, mockingbirds, various warblers, yellowthroats, red-winged blackbirds, meadowlarks, and various finches.

Spring

All the birds mentioned above plus eared and Western grebes, great blue herons, great and snowy egrets, green-winged, blue-winged and cinnamon teal, pintails, shovelers, wigeons, lesser scaup, surf scoters, buffleheads, red-breasted mergansers, ruddy ducks, sandpipers, long-billed curlews, whimbrels, marbled godwits, ruddy turnstones, cliff and barn swallows, and kingbirds.

Summer

All the birds mentioned above under the heading "all year" plus elegant terns, black skimmers, cliff and barn swallows, and kingbirds.

Fall

All the birds mentioned above under the heading "all year" plus

PHOTO TIP . . .

Generally, for bird photography, you want to be using the fastest shutter speed possible — 1/125 second or faster.

What I usually do is set my camera on aperture priority, select my widest aperture, and let the camera select the shutter speed. Since my lens is wide open, the camera will automatically select the fastest possible shutter speed for that aperture. I don't have to worry about anything other than focusing (as if that weren't enough!) and composition.

loons, eared, Western, and Clark's grebes, brown pelicans, great blue herons, great and snowy egrets, green-winged, blue-winged, and cinnamon teal, pintails, shovelers, wigeons, lesser scaup, surf scoters, buffleheads, red-breasted mergansers, ruddy ducks, sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks, greater yellowlegs, sandpipers, whimbrels, long-billed curlews, marbled godwits, ruddy turnstones, dunlin, Wilson's and red-necked phalaropes, elegant and common terns, black skimmers, tree, rough-winged, and barn swallows, and ruby-crowned kinglets.

Winter

All the birds mentioned above under the heading "all year" plus loons, eared, and Western grebes, brown pelicans, great blue herons, great and snowy egrets, green-winged, blue-winged, and cinnamon teal, mallards, pintails, shovelers, wigeons, lesser scaup, surf scoters, buffleheads, red-breasted mergansers, ruddy ducks, greater yellowlegs, long-billed curlews, marbled godwits, dunlin, and ruby-crowned kinglets.