

BIRDING SPOTS and ROAD GUIDE to THE CARRIZO PLAIN

Prepared by

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Comments, corrections and additions are welcome!

NOTES: **Please Read!**

- **DISCLAIMER:** These descriptions were developed through my own experiences, and are not officially endorsed by the CPNM administration.
- **PLAN:** The general plan of this description is as follows: starting at the Rte 58 & Bitterwater Road junction, going south on Soda Lake Road to Rte 166, then starting at the north end of Elkhorn Road and following it south to its juncture with Soda Lake Road, and finally to note several areas in western Cuyama Valley within SLO County. (Going “north” to “south” on Soda Lake and Elkhorn Roads one actually goes southeasterly, and even due east at times. “South” on either road is used to mean toward Rte 166; “north” to mean toward Rte 58.)
- **NAMES:** Unofficial, but generally accepted, names of roads and places are given in quotation marks.
- **ROAD CONDITIONS:** are given for most areas. These are my best assessment of the roads as I have found them. Drive all of these roads with caution **and at your own risk!! (And of course drive on established roads only!)**
- **GAS:** The closest gas stations in various direction are: on Route 101, Cuyama (expensive and unreliable hours) or in the Maricopa / Taft area.
- **PARKING:** Whether on main roads or on back roads, park with minimum impact. Often the least impact on lesser dirt roads is to park IN the road in a place where someone can drive around you with minimal impact. Chances are that nobody will need to pass you and therefore there has been zero impact. Use caution parking (and driving) in grassy and weedy areas during the dry season to avoid starting a fire with the hot vehicle exhaust system.
- **BIRDS:** Bird species are generally written in CAPITAL LETTERS. Although this is designed for birders, the emphasis here is on describing places more than birds, per se. Sometime in the near future (before the end of 2007) an updated “BIRDS OF CARRIZO PLAIN NATIONAL MONUMENT” will be published by BLM and will be available as a hard-copy or electronically on-line on the official BLM, CPNM web-site and on the MCAS website. Use this road guide as an adjunct to that list. ([Click here for Scott’s Oriole and LeConte’s Thrasher map.](#))
- **MAPS:** An official map of CPNM is found at their website on-line at <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/bakersfield/Programs/carrizo/carrizomap.html>. Google Earth maps on-line are very useful for detail, but the road overlays often show incorrect names, show roads that are closed or do not exist, show washes as roads, etc so use caution with that feature.

- **REPORTING BIRD SIGHTINGS:** The new “BIRDS OF CPNM ” will contain an email address to report new, rare, casual and other bird sightings from WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE MONUMENT. Details of sightings are very much appreciated, to include dates, places and descriptions and a way to contact the reporting individual. (A courtesy copy to me would also be appreciated, so that I can try to keep the list up to date, at aaschmierer@yahoo.com .)

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- 1) **BITTERWATER ROAD:** From San Luis Obispo, take Rte 58 east to the edge of the Carrizo. Take Bitterwater Road north through the flat country and then a few miles past the beginning of the rolling grassy hills. GRASSHOPPER SPARROWS are found some years in these grassy areas. The flat part is good for RAPTORS in winter, and sometimes large flocks of TRI-COLORED BLACKBIRDS.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Paved.

- 2) **CALIFORNIA VALLEY:** (See [MAP 02](#)) The best way, and perhaps the safest way, to sample the birds of California Valley is to turn right (south) off of Rte 58 five miles east of Bitterwater Road (1 mile east of the sharp angle in Rte 58 at the school) onto Branch Mountain Road. The first few miles of this road, plowed fields and power poles, is one of the best places on the Plain for RAPTORS in winter. It is much safer to drive slowly and stop on this road than on Rte 58 or on Soda Lake Road.

Branch Mountain Rd goes generally south, with some sweeping turns toward the end. Turn left (east) on Gaviota, right (south) on Dos Palos, left (east) on Dominguez, right (south) on Cunningham, left (east) on Cucamonga, right (south) on Garvey, and left (east) onto Circe. Circe joins Soda Lake Road about 0.7m north of Seven Mile Road. This route sounds complicated, but essentially follows the outer edge of the developed part of California Valley. There is no set way to bird the area. Some may prefer to just roam around the residential blocks.

Birding a residential area is always difficult, and it is especially so in this remote area. Use extra care not to trespass, and be careful to avoid obvious pointing of binoculars directly at houses! Birding is best in winter, for RAPTORS, MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRDS, and sometimes MOUNTAIN PLOVERS. Look for BURROWING OWLS in areas with ground squirrel holes. It is one of the better places on the Plain to look for some of the more rare ground-dwelling passerines like LARK BUNTING. SANDHILL CRANES, when present, in winters with good water in Soda Lake, spend the night on Soda Lake, then fly north or east to agricultural fields at first light. Sometimes they can be found by scanning the fields around California Valley and north onto Bitterwater Road.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Gravel, but with clay base that can be slippery when wet.

(OFF SODA LAKE RD)

- 3) **SEVEN MILE ROAD:** Turn south on Soda Lake Road for 0.7m from the end of # 2, or 7.6 miles south from the junction of Rte 58. Turn left onto Seven Mile Road. In 0.5m there is a small seasonal stream with potential for SHOREBIRDS during wet winters. Farther down the road, at mile 1.25, there is a more reliable pool on the right (south) side. Approach it slowly. It is sometimes the only water left late in the wet season and well into the spring and summer months. Check it for WATERFOWL and SHOREBIRDS.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Gravel, with clay base. OK except when very wet. Ok for sedans.

- 4) **SPRAGUEHILL ROAD**” **(0.0 MILES) (36.0 MILES FROM RTE 166)** (Signed: “Soda Lake San Diego Ck Road. Called “Claude Arnold Rd” on Google Earth maps.) (See [Map 04](#)) Located immediately south of Seven Mile Road, turning right (south) off of Soda Lake Road. This is just inside the Carrizo Plain National Monument (CPNM). **All other locations off of Soda Lake Road GIVEN IN RED ARE TOTAL CUMULATIVE MILES SOUTH OF THIS POINT. THIS POINT IS MILE (0.0). NUMBERS GIVEN IN BLUE ARE CUMULATIVE MILES FROM ROUTE 166 ALONG SODA LAKE ROAD.** When “right” or “left” is noted off of Soda Lake Road, it is assumed driving from north to south.

The fields along the first 0.5 miles may be good for MOUNTAIN PLOVERS in winter if the grass is short enough. Look for BURROWING OWLS in the flats. At mile 1.7 on Spraguehill Rd there is a small place to park on the right. Walking up this drainage is one of the easiest accesses in the northern part of CPNM to junipers. Wintering LONG-EARED OWLS have been found in this area. At the top of a short grade, at mile 2.3 there are GRASSHOPPER SPARROWS some years. In winter from this point to the end of the road, drive slowly (10-15 mph) and look for SPARROWS flushed up onto the fences. SAVANNAH SPARROWS are abundant and VESPER SPARROWS are generally easy to find. At about mile 5.0 check the fields and water trough on the left for TRICOLORED BLACKBIRDS and open-country species. The road ends at 5.5 miles at a locked gate (the north gate of Chimineas Ranch, although not marked as such). Check the water trough area for birds.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Gravel and clay. Slippery when wet. OK for sedans when dry.

- 5) **SODA LAKE OVERLOOK & TRAIL** **(2.1 MILES SOUTH OF CPNM BOUNDARY; 33.9 MILES FROM RTE 166):** (See [Map 05](#)) On the right (west) is a short road up to a parking area and short trail to a Soda Lake overlook. Good view, but no unusual birds. In wet winters when the SANDHILL CRANES are present and roosting in the lake, this overlook is a good place to look for them as they take off at first light to feed in the fields to the north. At this same mileage on the left side of Soda Lake Rd is a parking area and a short trail and boardwalk to the lake edge. This is in “alkaline scrub” habitat and lakeshore when there is a lake. There are SAGE SPARROWS in the thorny saltbush. In winter, SHORT-EARED OWLS seem to prefer the grassy, brushy flats around the lake and south of the lake. (LeConte’s Thrashers are NOT found in this habitat.)

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Rd paved. The overlook road is slippery when wet. Sedans OK when dry.

- 6) **“WINDMILL ROAD”:** **(3.9 MILES SOUTH OF CPNM BOUNDARY; 31.1 MILES FROM RTE 166):** (See [Map 06](#)) Named for the broken windmill near its start, this road loops over the first line of hills for about a mile to a locked gate (just past the hairpin turn on the map). Walk or bike past the gate to a water trough and a small wet area. Tule Elk

frequent this area. The grassy hills have potential for GRASSHOPPER_SPARROWS, and the wet areas for MIGRANTS.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Rd paved. “Windmill Rd” is dirt. Slippery when wet. OK for sedans when dry

- 7) **SIMMLER ROAD: (6.5 MILES SOUTH OF CPNM BOUNDARY; 28.5 MILES FROM RTE 166):** (See [Map 07](#)) This is one of the main Soda Lake viewing areas. It follows a small ridge that allows good views of Soda Lake and the smaller ponds to the south. Look for WATERFOWL and SHOREBIRDS during wet winters. This “Alkaline Scrub” habitat is good for SAGE SPARROWS, but NOT LeConte’s Thrashers. You may flush a SHORT-EARED OWL in this area. The road continues past the lake and in a few miles joins Elkhorn Road. The very barren area east of the steel tanks has historically been one of the better places for MOUNTAIN PLOVERS but they move around from year to year. (Near the tanks is the center of the Carrizo Plain CBC.)

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Rd paved. Simmler Road VERY slippery and IMPASSABLE when wet, even with 4x4. (Sometimes the surface looks dry, but there is still deep mud underneath.) OK for sedans when dry, but there may be deep ruts left from people being stuck in there during past wet weather.

- 8) **GUY L GOODWIN EDUCATION CENTER: (7.3 MILES SOUTH OF CPNM BOUNDARY; 29.7 MILES FROM RTE 166):** (See [Map 10](#)) Well-marked road to the right (west) off of Soda Lake Rd. Watch the fence on the right side as you drive in for SPARROWS. There are usually a few VESPER SPARROWS there in the winter. The power poles in this area are good for PRAIRIE FALCONS. The trees around the buildings can be great for MIGRANT PASSERINES, WESTERN KINGBIRDS, BULLOCK’S ORIOLES, etc. There are usually lots of SPARROWS, including SAGE SPARROWS, in the saltbushes around the Center. There is a resident GREATER ROADRUNNER, a bit used to human activity that often can be seen in the dry area south of the Center. (The irrigation of the shrubs is a big attraction for birds.)
The next three areas described are based from this location.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Rd paved. Road to Center is gravel and generally passable by sedans even after all but the most wet weather.

- 9) **PAINTED ROCK:** (See [Map10](#)) The road to Painted Rock goes directly south from #8 for about 2.5 miles to a parking lot. PRAIRIE FALCONS nest in the area. From the parking lot, a trail goes to the Painted Rock (named for the pictographs/rock art on its north side). There are often ROCK WRENS on the rock. Although not related to the rock, ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS are sometimes seen in winter in this general area. There are breeding GRASSHOPPER SPARROWS in this area, and the grasslands are good for wintering SPARROWS.

ROAD CONDITIONS: This road is closed at times to reduce disturbance to wildlife. It is dirt and can be impassable when wet. OK for sedans when dry.

10) SAUCITO RANCH: (See [Map 10](#)) Park at #8. This road is closed to motor traffic, but open to hiking and bicycles. The road is the continuation of the education center access road (the northeast most red dot on the map is Soda Lake Rd), and continues past a locked gate due west for 1.4 m to a “T”. Go left (south) for another mile or so to the ranch (multiple red dots on the map). This was the first ranch on the Plain. The buildings and trees around the ranch house provide nesting spots for many resident birds and roosting BARN OWLS are common. Because of its more difficult access, it is very underbirded, but has the potential for being a migrant hotspot. The only County record of WILLIAMSON’S SAPSUCKER is from here. Continue through the gate at the far side of the buildings for another 100 yards to a water overflow area with cattails and willows; part two of the OASIS. Walk the road that continues past the windmill for an additional mile (see map) to another cattail-willow spring (last red dot at the southwest part of the map). GREAT potential!

ROAD CONDITIONS: The road is sandy-clay. There is a short stretch of deep sand just before and after the gate, making biking difficult, but most of the rest of the road is relatively flat and not much sand; good biking.

11) AMERICAN RANCH: (see [Map 11](#)) Park at #8. See notes for #10. Access to this area is the same as for # 10, except that at the “T” turn right (north). In 0.4 miles the road turns left (west) for another 0.7 miles to a water trough and some old ranch buildings. Continue past the ranch buildings for another 0.6 miles to another water trough and a row of tall trees. This area is similar to, but not as productive as Saucito Ranch, with smaller trees and less water, but worth checking once in a while especially during migration.

ROAD CONDITIONS: See # 10 for the start of the route. After the right turn at the “T” the road continues pretty much flat to the ranch, then more steeply to the tall trees.

12) SELBY CAMPGROUND: (**8.1 MILES SOUTH OF CPNM BOUNDARY; 28.9 MILES FROM RTE 166**): The road to Selby Campground (and Caliente Ridge) turns right (south) off of Soda Lake Road, just south of the turn-off to the Goodwin Education Center. After a mile or so of straight road, good for wintering SPARROWS along the roadside fence, the road curves left and starts to gain elevation. Some years GRASSHOPPER SPARROWS nest here. At mile 3.7, at an old ranch site, the road forks. Take the left fork (the right fork is Caliente Ridge Road and is described in #13). The campground is reached in another 0.7 miles. Camping here provides a good base for birding. POORWILLS, GREAT HORNED OWLS, LONG-EARED OWLS and NORTHERN PYGMY OWLS (the only 2 records of this species on CPNM) may be heard up-canyon from the campground. Just up-slope from the campground is a parking area. From there, walk up an old road through juniper scrub and, as the slope gets steeper, scrub oaks. The trail gets very difficult to follow, then gets a bit better as it follows a ridge upward. ([Map 12](#) shows the campground on the right side, with the parking area just past it, and one can see the faint outline of the trail meandering west and south from there. This trail, such as it is, in less than a mile joins the Caliente Ridge Road where that road makes a big curve to the east. It is steep and brushy and the trail is hard to follow!)

Anywhere that you wander in this area is good birding. The scrub oaks, especially in the ravine, provide a unique habitat for birds not seen in most other parts of the monument, like OAK TITMOUSE, NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER, PHAINOPEPLA, WESTERN BLUEBIRDS, and perhaps breeding CASSIN'S VIREO, ETC. Migrating WARBLERS, BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAKS and a variety of other birds, like CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRDS use this habitat some years. LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCHES are usually seen there in the spring.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Road is paved. Road to the fork and to the campground is wide, gravel, but with a clay base. It can get slippery when wet, but generally settles fast. OK for sedans when dry.

- 13) **CALIENTE PEAK ROAD:** (See [Map13](#)) Approach is the same as in #12 above, but take the right fork at the old ranch site. The road is marked on the map starting at the right side of the map (where the road to the campground can be seen also) and going south and west to the top. There is a side road at mile 1.7 (from the fork) on the right side, called "1.7 Mile Road" by some. There is a place to park at the base of this road/trail, but the road is gated to vehicles. A short walk up this trail through the junipers and scrub oaks can be quite productive, especially the first half mile. Wintering or migrating HERMIT THRUSHES, FOX SPARROWS, WARBLERS as well as those listed in #12 may be seen here in season.

Continuing up Caliente Peak Road, the juniper-oak habitat continues and should be birded wherever there is a safe place to pull off the road. Just before reaching the top (~mile 2.9) there is a large pull-off/parking area on the right. This is the Caliente Peak Trailhead. A short distance farther up the main road (3.0 miles from the starting point at the fork) one is at the top of the ridge, shown as a "T" in the lower left (southwest) corner of the map.) At the "T" the road to the left (south, locked gate) ridge-runs to the top of Caliente Peak, a distance of 8.0 miles one way. The trailhead noted a few lines back joins this ridge road after a short distance and can be seen as a triangle on the map. One could bird a short loop by parking at the trailhead parking area, walking the trail to the ridge road, back along the ridge road and then back down the main road to the vehicle.

From the 3.0 mile "T" on Caliente Peak Road, the main road continues along the ridge toward the southwest for a few miles through the junipers and grassy slopes, with fair birding potential. Just past the FAA (?) buildings, the road starts to descend into the Cuyama Valley. It ends in the oil fields on the north side of the Cuyama River. The very dry and steep slopes on this side of the Calientes are rarely birded. What is there is somewhat of an unknown. Perhaps BLACK-THROATED SPARROWS breed there?

ROAD CONDITIONS: From the fork to the top is a narrow, steep and winding dirt road. It is sometimes gated off at the fork at the base in the winter due to muddy conditions. If the gate is open, that does NOT mean that there is not mud during the rainy season. Much of the year the road, although steep, is accessible by most sedans. If it has rained recently or MAY rain during your visit, the road may be slippery and have ruts from others who have tried it. Remember that 4x4 does little good on the downhill! On

the Cuyama Valley side there are some steep downgrades. Even in dry weather some vehicles may have traction problems getting back up. There is no access to Rte 166.

- 14) **PANORAMA ROAD**: (**13.0 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY**; **24.0 MILES FROM RTE 166**): (See [Map 14](#)) At this junction on Soda Lake Rd, a gated road goes right (south) to Washburn administrative area; closed to the public. The road left is Panorama Road (although marked “Soda Lake San Diego Creek “, or some such thing at the intersection, and “Sirnler Soda Lake Rd” on some Google Earth maps. It goes due north for 2.8 miles, then northeast for 0.8 miles. At this point, near a large metal building, there is a road to the left (incorrectly called “Elkhorn Rd” on the Google Earth maps) that goes north and joins Elkhorn Rd in another 3.9 miles. At the same intersection, going straight ahead, still called Panorama Road by most but shown as “Calhoun Rd” on the Google Earth Map, will take you past an old gravel pit on the right in 1.5 miles and to Elkhorn Road in another 1.5 miles. The area of large saltbushes just south and west (down slope) from the gravel pit is a known location for LE CONTE’S THRASHERS and one of the few places that they have been found on recent Carrizo Plain CBCs. Back at the intersection with the large metal building, the area around the building and to the north has been a good area for MOUNTAIN PLOVERS some winters.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Rd 2.8 miles south of the Selby/Caliente Peak Rd turns from paved to gravel. It remains gravel for many miles. The gravel is generally an all-weather surface, but caution is needed during active rain or after heavy and prolonged rains; the surface may become slick. Panorama Road is VERY IMPASSABLE in wet weather and sometimes remains that way for weeks/months. (The low part of this road is nearing the southern limit of the “Alkaline scrub” habitat.) Do not even try it in 4x4 if it is at all wet! During the winter it is often easier to get to the gravel pit and the Le Conte’s Thrasher and the Mountain Plover locations by approaching from the north end of Elkhorn Rd. (See # 33.)

- 15) **KCL CAMPGROUND** (**17.7 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY**; **19.3 MILES FROM RTE 166**): The KCL Campground is located on a short road to the right (west) off of Soda Lake Road, about 4.7 miles south of the Panorama Rd turn-off. The mature eucalyptus trees at the campground provide shade for the campers and a good spot to look for migrating PASSERINES. The saltbushes behind and north of the campground are also used by MIGRANTS and year-round by SAGE SPARROWS. To my knowledge this is NOT Le Conte’s Thrasher habitat.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Rd is still gravel; see # 14 notes. The road to the campground is dirt but is short and flat. It can get slippery, but generally dries fast. Ok for sedans most of the time.

- 16) **“WELLS RANCH” – ABBOTT CANYON AREA (21.7 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 15.3 MILES FROM RTE 166/ 4.0 MILES SOUTH OF KCL CAMPGROUND):** (See [Map 16](#)) This unmarked road turns right (west) off of Soda Lake road immediately south of a cattle guard. The start of this road (at the cattle guard) is represented by the red route at the right (east) side of the map. Go west on this road for 1.5 miles to a “T” intersection. Turn right (north) for another 1.1 miles to an old ranch (the Wells Ranch). At the Wells Ranch take a right (northwest). After 0.6 miles stay straight ahead where the better-traveled road turns right to an active ranch (collection of trailers). In another 0.35 miles turn right onto a lesser road that very shortly crosses a wash, curves to the right for a while, then curves back to the left (westerly) and dead-ends at mile 0.75 at a locked gate (the left or west-most red dot on the map). Walking past the gate, the road goes for several miles through juniper habitat to the base of Abbott Canyon. In the first mile of walking there were two singing male SCOTT’S ORIOLES in June of 2007. (This is the farthest north known breeding site for SCOTT’S ORIOLES in the County.)

Driving out, at the first intersection, if one were to take a right, it would take you up “Juniper Wash” This is all interesting habitat, and should be checked more often, especially during migration. It is directly at the base of Caliente Peak, is all healthy juniper scrub habitat and is all potential SCOTT’S ORIOLE habitat . This “Juniper Canyon Road” is marked in green on the map. The road marked in blue takes you back to the “Wells Ranch”.

ROAD CONDITIONS: All of these are dirt roads and are generally well-rutted from erosion. In dry weather a high-clearance vehicle would be recommended. In wet weather roads would be slippery if not impassable even with 4x4. The “Juniper Wash” part of the road is sandy as it follows in the wash. The cutover road (blue on the map) is rather steep.

- 17) **“AGAVE WASH” (21.8 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 15.2 MILES FROM RTE 166/ 4.1 MILES SOUTH OF KCL CAMPGROUND):** (See [Map 16](#)) This sandy wash crosses Soda Lake Road just south of the access road shown for #16. On Map 16, Soda Lake Rd is the angled road in the upper right. “Agave Wash” can be seen on that map, as can a small road that follows the south edge of the wash. Walk up or down near the wash. (Walking directly IN the sandy wash is discouraged, because of an endangered moth that is being studied there.) Habitat is ephedra and saltbush. There is a recent June date for a singing BREWER’S SPARROW within 100 feet of Soda Lake Rd there. (Brewer’s Sparrows seem to favor ephedra elsewhere in the area during migration, but there are no recent breeding records in the county.)

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Road is still gravel in this area.

- 18) **“VAN METRE RANCH ROAD” (22.8 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 14.2 MILES FROM RTE 166/ 5.1 MILES SOUTH OF KCL CAMPGROUND):** (See [Map 18](#)) Driving southeast on Soda Lake Road from #17, there are TWO small and unmarked roads going left (north). “Van Metre Ranch Road” is

the second of these. Two miles down “Van Metre Ranch Road”, just as you approach some steel tanks, take a left through the fence. This road immediately starts to follow the left side of a fence line. The road angles left after a short distance, follows another fence line, and ends in a wash. “Van Metre Ranch Rd” is highlighted on [Map 18](#), starting at Soda Lake Rd at the bottom and ending at the wash at the top. Soda Lake Road can be seen across the bottom (going east-west at this point, where left takes you toward Rte 58. “Agave Wash” can be seen just left of the start of “Van Metre Ranch Rd”.) The mature saltbush between the steel tanks and the wash are excellent for LE CONTE’S THRASHERS and SAGE SPARROWS. There are lots of ROCK WRENS in the wash, where they nest in the holes in the banking.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Dirt. Impassable when wet. After the steel tanks, high clearance is best. This section can have very tall weeds after a wet winter, so be mindful of the chance of starting a fire with the vehicle exhaust system! The road continues up the wash, but driving it is NOT recommended. There is deep sand and the wash branches many times making it very easy to get lost. If one were to go up this wash, it passes through the Elkhorn Scarp (the raised ridge between the plain and the Temblor Mountains on the northeast) and emerges onto a bench where it joins Elkhorn Road just south of the south edge of the “biological study area” (see #33, [mile 21.0](#)).

- 19) **TRAVER RANCH: (24.8 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 12.2 MILES FROM RTE 166/ 7.1 MILES SOUTH OF KCL CAMPGROUND):** (See [Map 21](#)) The ranch is on the right (south) side of the road in the middle of a short paved section of Soda Lake Road. There is a parking area and display of historic farm equipment. Check the trees for MIGRANTS.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Paved just north and south of ranch, then back to gravel in both directions.

- 20) **“LITTLE GRAND CANYON”:** (~25.8 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 11.2 MILES FROM RTE 166/ ~1.0 MILES SOUTH OF TRAVER RANCH): (See [Map 21](#)) On the left (north) side of Soda Lake Road there is a deeply eroded wash which is locally called “the Little Grand Canyon”. Although not recorded, this dirt banking has the potential for nesting BANK SWALLOWS perhaps?

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Road is gravel again at this point.

- 21) **“VAN METRE RANCH CUTOFF ROAD”:** (26.1 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 10.9 MILES FROM RTE 166/ 1.3 MILES SOUTH OF TRAVER RANCH): (See [Map 21](#)) This road turns sharply left (north) off of Soda Lake Road just as Soda Lake Road turns toward the south again. The saltbush on both sides of this road for a half mile or so is good for LE CONTE’S THRASHER. South of the road looks good also, but none have been reported there.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Road gravel. This road goes more or less due north, ending at old ranch buildings and the steel tanks referenced in #18. It is impassable when

wet. It is hard to follow after wet winters due to weeds in the road. Otherwise it is flat and generally smooth. (No map is given, because Google Earth has miss-marked most of the roads in this area, including Soda Lake Rd.)

- 22) **“THE CROSSOVER ROAD” aka “GRAFFITI TANK ROAD”: (28.2 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 8.8 MILES FROM RTE 166/ 3.4 MILES SOUTH OF TRAVER RANCH)**: This road turns left (east) off of Soda Lake Road. The saltbush on both sides of the base of this road and on the west side of Soda Lake Road is known LE CONTE’S THRASHER habitat. (The habitat along Soda Lake Road north to #21 and south to #23 should also have LE CONTE’S THRASHERS.) “The Crossover Road” winds east for 2 miles up to the top of the Elkhorn Scarp where there is an old steel tank covered with graffiti, then down for 2.7 miles to where it joins Elkhorn Road. (See [Map 22](#), where Soda Lake Road is in the far bottom left corner and Elkhorn Road is at the top of the marked road. The notation of “Simmler-Soda Lake Rd” in the far upper right is incorrect.)

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Road is gravel. “The Crossover Road” is dirt and is slippery when wet. When dry, it is narrow and steep, but is generally reasonably smooth. The east side has a steep downhill section, so traction is more of an issue than clearance per se.

- 23) **“CALF-SHED CORRAL”: (29.1 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 7.9 MILES FROM RTE 166 /4.3 MILES SOUTH OF TRAVER RANCH)**: This an obvious corral and “calf-shed” on the left (northeast) side of Soda Lake Road. The saltbush habitat around the corral, and across and along Soda Lake Road, is good for LECONTE’S THRASHERS, and represents the southern limit of sightings along Soda Lake Road.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Road is gravel. The loop to corral is dirt and slippery when wet.

- 24) **PADRONE SPRINGS: (29.1 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 7.9 MILES FROM RTE 166 / 4.3 MILES SOUTH OF TRAVER RANCH)**: (See [Map 24](#)) The road to Padrone Springs off of Soda Lake Road is marked from the south only, and is called “Padronnes Spring Rd” (there are a variety of ways that this is spelled on various signs and maps). It leaves Soda Lake Road directly across from #23. The marking on Map 24 starts on the right at Soda Lake Road and ends at the spring. Along Padrone Springs road at mile 1.0 there is a road left (south) that is a cut-off (see #27) to the Quail Springs Road (see #26). At mile 1.4 there is another road left (south) that dead-ends in a short way. At mile 2.8 there is an old ranch-site on the right. At mile 3.0 a road left goes straight into a rocky canyon. Take this left, park, and walk up-canyon through the narrow rock dam. There is usually wet grass and small puddles of standing water in the drainage slightly to the left past the narrow spot, and on-and-off upstream to the steep slope. The best vantage point is to walk up the right side of the little ridge that forms the creek’s right bank to a place where you can look down, then sit patiently. Any birds in the area will use this little spring, especially in the late summer and fall.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW, LEWIS'S WOODPECKER and other interesting birds have been seen there.

ROAD CONDITIONS: The road is dirt, and thus slippery when wet. It is not steep at any point, and when dry is generally OK in a sedan.

25) LAWSON SPRINGS AND PADRONE CANYON: (STARTING FROM PADRONE SPRINGS): As you leave the short road into Padrone Springs, bear LEFT (west) on the main road. In 0.75 miles there is a dead-end road to the right, and at 1.7 miles there is a crossroads with power poles. Go left (south) to the end. Lawson Springs is on the left. (The red marking on [Map 25a](#) starts on the right at Padrone Springs and ends at Lawson Springs.) There is a water trough with running water, willows, a few trees and there used to be cattails, although these have died back in recent years. It is particularly good for MIGRANTS, but attracts all of the local breeders also.

Leaving the short side-road to the Lawson Springs, a right turn (east) heads you back toward Soda Lake Road; OR one may continue exploring (See [Map 25a](#) and [25b](#)). If you turn left (west, along the road marked in yellow on Map 25a): keep to the left at the junction (mile 0.3). Past the junction the road bears left (south) and tops out on a ridge, and at mile 0.8 there is a road on the right (marked in green on maps). This road goes down Padrone Canyon to the Cuyama (see road conditions before you attempt to go down). In the first junipers along the right side of the Padrone Canyon side road, SCOTT'S ORIOLES have been found in the past few years. This is the only know place in the Calientes where they are on the Cuyama side of the slope. It is about a 3.5 mile (one way) hike down Padrone Canyon to the edge of the Cuyama ag fields. At the base, as the canyon starts to widen with alluvium, BREWER'S SPARROWS have been seen in recent years, suggesting breeding. It is a very under-birded area.

From the top of the Padrone Canyon Road, if one continues up the ridge for another 0.1+ miles there is another road to the right (marked in blue on maps). This is a power line access road that ends up at the bottom of Padrone Canyon via several steep ridges. In the first basin there has been a likely breeding SCOTT'S ORIOLE in the junipers.

Continuing up the ridge road, the road looks straight down onto Lawson Springs. The road then continues for several miles up the ridge through juniper habitat, to the top of a small mountain.

ROAD CONDITIONS: The part from Padrone Springs to Lawson Springs is dirt, and thus slippery when wet, but is generally smooth and OK for a sedan when dry. It remains about the same, although a little steeper, to the place where the ridge road looks down onto Lawson Springs. Past this point, the road gets steeper and more rutted and 4x4 would be advised. The side road down Padrone Canyon starts out VERY steep, and should not be attempted without 4x4 AND good traction (ie not an empty pickup truck). In about a half mile the road gets very bad, due to washouts. It is better hiked. Same advise for the power-lines road.

26) QUAIL SPRINGS: (30.8 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 6.2 MILES FROM RTE 166 / 6.0 MILES SOUTH OF KCL CAMPGROUND): (See [Map 26](#): the road is marked from Soda Lake Road on the far right to the end of the road.) Quail Springs can be very quiet, but overall is one of the best birding spots in the Carrizo, especially in late summer and fall migration! The road to Quail Springs leaves Soda Lake Road to the right (southwest) 1.7 miles south of the Padrone road (see #24). (From the south, the road leaves Soda Lake Road 0.5 miles north of where the pavement turns to gravel.)

Driving Quail Springs Road: At mile 0.1 there is an active water trough on the left, which should be checked for SPARROWS. At mile 0.6, bear left (see #27 for the road to the right; “Quail Springs – Padrone Springs Cutoff Road”.) At mile 0.8 a short road goes up a hill and dead-ends. At mile 1.4 a road goes left. It is called “Blue Well Rd” (see #29), and goes back down and joins Soda Lake Road. At mile 1.9 there is a road left that heads south to pipeline Road (see # 30). At mile 2.25 there is another road left (just before a corral). This road is essentially a power line road. It goes south to a great overlook over the Cuyama Valley, then continues down some VERY steep grades and ends up at the bottom of Quail Springs Canyon (a road better hiked than driven). Back on Quail Springs Road, at mile 2.7 there is a road left that immediately starts up a steep hill. This road goes to the springs, but you have two options:

- 1) With 4x4 and good traction you can drive up this road, then down a steep hill. In about 0.25 miles the road effectively dead-ends into a parking spot of sorts. Do not drive past that spot. Park there and walk down the road fork to the left. In a few hundred feet the road/path starts to follow the edge of a wash. JUST after the path starts to follow this wash you can start to see some puddles in the wash ahead. This is a good place to scope the puddles and the hillsides to sort through the thousands of birds that use this meager little spring.
- 2) Preferred option. Back at the 2.7 mile intersection, instead of bearing left, stay on the main road for another few hundred yards to the bottom of the hill and park on the left where there is an obvious path. Walk down this small wash on coyote trails until it opens up and joins a bigger wash from the right, then continue left 10-20 feet and join a road. (You have now joined the route described in option #1.) In 20-30 feet is the viewing spot described in option #1. (The walk from the Quail Springs Road to the “viewing spot” is 0.4 miles.)

Walk down-canyon. The trickle of a spring stays above-ground for about 150-200 yards, then goes under the sand. There is an old tank on the left and the wash turns left. In a few hundred feet it runs sharply right again. JUST at this right bend, go up an obvious short steep trail on the right. At the top (50 feet or so) you look down on a second spring/mud puddle, with a few cattails around it. This is a good place to set up scope and quietly watch the spring.

Some birds seen at Quail Springs include PINYON JAY (1 record), CHUKAR, GRAY FLYCATCHER, SCOTT’S ORIOLE, BREWER’S SPARROW, CHIPPING

SPARROW, CLAY-COLORED SPARROW, BLACK-THROATED SPARROW, LEWIS'S WOODPECKER, abundant SAGE SPARROWS, MIGRATING WARBLERS, CHUKAR, etc. Sometimes in the spring LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCHES are abundant there.

About a half mile down-canyon there is another small spring as the rocky walls force the water to the surface. CLIFF SWALLOWS and VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOWS breed here. The canyon ends up at the edge of the Cuyama ag fields. This habitat is very much under-birded.

Walking up-canyon from the top part of the spring is good for SCOTT'S ORIOLES and MIGRANTS.

Back to the Quail Springs Road: at mile 3.0 there is a faint road on the left with "road closed" signs. Walk up on this ridge. This little gulch (actually upper Quail Springs Canyon) is a great place to bird. It is juniper habitat and close to the spring. Often there are SCOTT'S ORIOLES in this area. At mile 3.4 the road ends. From the Quail Springs side road to this end of the road, sort of a basin, is all good SCOTT'S ORIOLE breeding territory, and probably the best place in the county to look for them. To find one, you must be familiar with their call and be patient. Sometimes they respond to tapes. May is a good month to look.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Road is gravel. Quail Springs Road is dirt, and slippery when wet. Just past the water trough there is a place where rain collects into a persistent puddle in the road, obvious by the ruts and place where people have driven around. This is the only standing puddle on the road, so if the road in general looks passably dry and you think that you can safely get through the puddle, it is probably safe to go the rest of the route. The rest of the road to the springs area is narrow and rather steep in places. Some of the steep places are rather deeply erosion-rutted. The side road (not recommended) to the spring is very steep, requiring 4x4 and good traction. The main road just past this turn-off is deeply rutted to the option #2 springs approach and for another 100 yards, then is good to the end. When dry it can generally be driven in a sedan with front-wheel drive if the driver is experienced in driving dirt roads; it will require avoiding and sometimes straddling ruts in the road. Rear-wheel drive pickup trucks may have difficulty with traction on the steep part of the grade.

- 27) **"QUAIL SPRINGS- PADRONE SPRINGS CUTOFF ROAD"**: (See [Map 27](#)) The south end of this road is the right fork at mile 0.6 of the Quail (see #26). The north end of this road is the left off of Padrone Springs Road at mile 1.0 (see #24). The area around the sandy wash (seen on Map 27 toward the north end of this road) is perhaps the best birding: BREWER'S SPARROWS have been seen there, BULLOCK'S and SCOTT'S ORIOLES (just northwest of the wash) seen in adjoining junipers, a LESSER NIGHTHAWK nest (2007), NASHVILLE and several other WARBLERS, etc. There is mature ephedra and juniper habitat.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Dirt. There are some erosion gullies in the road but there are no steep grades. Can be done in a sedan with CARE.

- 28) **“HANLINE RANCH CORRAL”: (32.0 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 5.0 MILES FROM RTE 166 / 7.2 MILES SOUTH OF KCL CAMPGROUND):** This is an obvious corral with several old sheds and a number of trees. There is no water here, but the trees attract tree-nesting species like WESTERN KINGBIRD and BULLOCK’S ORIOLES, and the weeds attract FINCHES and SPARROWS. It is worth checking during migration. (A quick check in the spring of 2007 yielded a HAMMOND’S FLYCATCHER and 3 CHIPPING SPARROWS.)

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Road is paved at this point, and remains so all the way to Rte 166. The loop to the corral is dirt.

- 29) **“BLUE WELL ROAD”: (32.2 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 4.4 MILES FROM RTE 166/ 7.4 MILES SOUTH OF KCL CAMPGROUND):** This road turns right (west) off of Soda Lake Road just south of the corral (see #28). It is an alternate route to join up with the Quail Springs Road (see # 26). (See [Map 26](#))

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Road paved. “Blue Well Road” similar to Quail Springs Road (see # 26). If there is a puddle / mud-hole blocking access to Quail Springs Road this approach to Quail Springs may or may not be better.

- 30) **PIPELINE ROAD: (32.8 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 3.8 MILES FROM RTE 166/ 8.0 MILES SOUTH OF KCL CAMPGROUND):** (See [Map 30](#)) Pipeline Road provides the easiest way to bird the Cuyama Slope of the Calientes. It is marked with a road sign. Turn right (southwest) off of Soda Lake Road. (This is about 1.0 mile north of the CPNM Kiosk.)

On Pipeline Road: at the top of the grade, about mile 1.8, there is a road to the right (north) that cuts over through grassy hills to join the Quail Springs Road (see # 26). Continuing on Pipeline Road, at about mile 3.3 the road starts to enter the top of a canyon (see “Road Conditions”). At about mile 4.0 there is a road to the right, that is the start of a loop marked on Map 30. Take the left fork. At about mile 4.5, almost to the ag fields, there is a fork in the road. This is a good place to park and explore. One can follow the fence line at the edge of the fields in either direction. Going left, it is about 2 miles along the fence line to the Kern County line. Going right, one could walk for many miles. Because of poor road conditions (see below), one could park at the top of the canyon, back at mile 3.3, walk the 1.5 miles to the edge of the ag fields and explore for a bit, then walk the other end of the marked loop and back to the vehicle. This would be a 4+ mile loop. The route marked on Map 30 starts at Soda Lake Road (the red dot at the top) and ends at the Cuyama ag fields almost due north of Rte 33.

This is not a very “birdy” place in any sheer numbers, but this area is pretty much of an unknown and therefore worth our attention. The grassy hills along the first 3 miles of Pipeline Road are CHUKAR habitat. The last 1.5 miles (in the canyon) might have

unusual SPARROWS. The last recorded breeding BREWER'S SPARROWS in the county were near the fence line in past years.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Soda Lake Road is paved at this point. Pipeline Road is dirt, and slippery when wet. The road to the top and down to the 3.3 mile mark is not excessively steep and is generally pretty smooth, generally OK in a sedan with good traction. After the 3.3 mile point, the road starts down into a canyon and has some VERY steep grades, sand and a few rocks as it follows the bottom of the wash. This is generally drivable in a 4x4 vehicle with reasonable clearance and traction. After flash floods, however, the road could be far worse. I have only driven the left (easterly) part of the final loop as shown on the map. Condition of the rest of the marked loop is unknown.

- 31) ELKHORN ROAD: (33.2 MILES SOUTH OF THE CPNM BOUNDARY; 3.2 MILES FROM RTE 166/ 8.4 MILES SOUTH OF KCL CAMPGROUND):** Starting at Soda Lake Road: at mile 0.35 there is a side road to the right that dead-ends in a few miles in excellent CHUKAR country. At mile 1.1 Elkhorn Road reaches the top of the Elkhorn Scarp. At mile 2.9 there is a road left that dead-ends at a large tree called "The Hanging Tree". This bowl-like end of the valley is called "Beam Flats". At about mile 3.0 there is another left; stay straight ahead for another 0.1 miles to the junction with Elkhorn Ridge Road. (Elkhorn Ridge Road goes over the Temblors and joins Rte 166 at the Ralston-Purina plant.) (See [Map 31](#)) Soda Lake Road is at the bottom of the map, and the junction of Elkhorn Road and Elkhorn Grade Road is at the top of the marked route on the map. (See #33 for the rest of Elkhorn Road.)

ROAD CONDITIONS: Elkhorn road is dirt and is thus slippery when wet. There some moderately steep grades, but none that require 4x4 in dry conditions. Most of Elkhorn road, all the way to Rte 58, is generally comfortably driven in a sedan under dry conditions.

- 32) RTE 166: (36.4 MILES SOUTH OF THE NORTH CPNM BOUNDARY (0.0 MILES) / 11.7 MILES SOUTH OF KCL CAMPGROUND)**

(ELKHORN ROAD)

33) ELKHORN ROAD: This section gives some mileages and descriptions of areas and side roads off of Elkhorn Road, STARTING AT THE NORTH END AND ENDING AT THE JUNCTION WITH ELKHORN GRADE ROAD (see # 31). Miles given in BLACK ARE MILES FROM THE LAST NOTE. Miles given in (RED) ARE TOTAL MILES SOUTH FROM THE NORTH END OF ELKHORN ROAD. MILES IN (BLUE) ARE TOTAL MILES FROM THE JUNCTION WITH SODA LAKE ROAD AT THE SOUTH END AND MEASURED NORTH TO THE NORTH BOUNDARY OF CPNM.

Far more space in these notes is devoted to birding spots and other places off of Soda Lake Road, rather than on Elkhorn Road. This is for several reasons:

- 1) Soda Lake Road is paved in part, and reasonably all-weather gravel in part. The entire length of Elkhorn Road is dirt. For this reason, access to Elkhorn is very limited in the winter / rainy season. **Small amounts of rain make the road slippery; moderate or prolonged rain makes it impassable.**
- 2) There are no real springs along the road to attract birds.
- 3) Most of the side roads are either described in the Soda Lake Road section, or go northeast into the Temblor Mountains through mostly very arid grasslands. There are very few areas of juniper habitat, which is preferred by many breeding species and migrants.

ROAD CONDITIONS: Road conditions will not be given as a separate section of the write-ups. Assume that all roads are dirt and that they are slippery to impassable when wet. In some places there are standing puddles / mud holes during the rainy season. Any notes on specific roads will be given with the general description of that area or road. Most of Elkhorn road, all the way south to Soda Lake Road, is generally comfortably driven in a sedan under dry conditions.

BIRDS: All of Elkhorn Road is good for RAPTORS in the winter. Elkhorn Road gets you to several excellent areas to look for LE CONTE'S THRASHERS. There is very little traffic, making stopping for birds easy and safe!

DIRECTIONS TO START: Take Rte 58 east, past Soda Lake Road to the far eastern edge of the plain. Just before Rte 58 starts uphill into San Diego Creek Canyon, take Seven Mile Road to the right (southwest). In 0.3 miles, turn left onto Elkhorn Road. (See Map [33a](#)) This is the reference point for the red mileage marks.

2.5 MILES (2.5 MILES) (35.5 MILES) **SIMMLER ROAD:** (See #7) The area around this intersection and down Simmler Road is good for MOUNTAIN PLOVERS in winter. Check the power poles for RAPTORS.

1.4 MILES (3.9 MILES) (33.1 MILES) **WALLACE CREEK:** A short hike to this location shows you dramatic evidence of the San Andreas Fault in action.

1.4 MILES (5.3 MILES) (30.3 MILES) The saltbush habitat here has had the northernmost records for LECONTE'S THRASHERS. The prime habitat for these shy thrashers is flattish ground with at least a few large, thick, healthy saltbush shrubs, ideally with some open ground or very sparse vegetation around them or under them. In some locations the saltbush is very widely scattered, sometimes 100 feet apart. From here all the way south to "The Crossover Road" look in this type of habitat for them.

1.2 MILES (6.5 MILES) (29.1 MILES) **"PANORAMA ROAD CUT-OFF"**: (See [Map 33b](#)) At this point Elkhorn Road turns left and another road goes straight ahead. LECONTE'S THRASHERS have been seen at this intersection. Take this right fork, that I am calling "Panorama Road Cut-off" (and is incorrectly called Elkhorn Road if you zoom in on a Google Earth map of the area). It is better birding. The section of Elkhorn Road that we are bypassing is in general overgrazed, such that birding is poor. **The miles will be calculated by this described route.** (On Map 33a, this route is marked, starting at the top left and angling in a straight line to the southeast.) There are two barbed wire gates along this section of road as it passes through private land to Panorama Road. The southern end of this road has been good for MOUNTAIN PLOVERS some years.

3.9 MILES (10.5 MILES) (25.2 MILES) **PANORAMA ROAD**: "Panorama Cut-off Road" joins Panorama Road at this intersection. All sides of this intersection have been good for MOUNTAIN PLOVERS some years. There is a large metal building just south of the intersection. At this intersection, go left (east) on Panorama Road (shown as "Calhoun Rd" if you zoom in on Google earth maps). (See [Map 33b](#) and [Map 14](#))

1.5 MILES (12.0 MILES) (23.7 MILES) **PANORAMA ROAD GRAVEL PIT**: Stop before the short side road to the right (south) that goes to an old gravel pit. LE'CONTE'S THRASHERS have been seen regularly (although never easily) in the saltbush down slope from here. This is one of the only places that LE CONTE'S THRASHERS have been seen in recent years on the Carrizo CBC. (See [Map 33b](#) and [Map 14](#))

1.5 MILES (13.5 MILES) (22.2 MILES) **ELKHORN ROAD**: From the old gravel pit, continue on the Panorama Road, now going northeast, to the next major intersection. There are two gates along this section. At this intersection, take a right; you are now back on Elkhorn Road (seen on [Map33a](#) as the end of the highlighted route). The habitat here and going south on Elkhorn is a mix of ephedra and saltbush. Any areas of large, healthy saltbush have potential for LE CONTE'S THRASHERS.

0.4 MILES (13.9 MILES) (21.8 MILES) **HURRICANE ROAD** (aka "Crocker Grade"). Side road: at this intersection, Hurricane Road turns left. This road when dry is generally in pretty good shape. It curves its way up some steep grades to the top of the Temblor Range. At the top of the grade there is a steep road left (north) that dead-ends. Just past this is a better road left. This road left continues north for many miles along the ridge-line. At mile 4.2 (after many side roads and alternate roads up steep hills) one comes to a water tank. Just before the tank is a gate on the left. This area just through the gate and for the next mile or so has areas of junipers and good stands of oaks. (It is just inside the

county and just within CPNM.) The Temblors are under-birded and need more coverage. Hurricane Road at some point becomes Crocker Springs Road and ends in Taft and Rte 58. The road down this east slope is steep and rough. It turns to pavement in about 7 miles in the midst of the oilfields and eventually joins Rte 33 north of Taft.

5.1 MILES (19.0 MILES) (16.7 MILES) **SIDE ROAD:** At this mileage there is small road that angles right (southwest). A small steel tank can be seen down the road a short way. LE CONTE'S THRASHERS have been seen between the road and the tank.

2.8 MILES (21.6 MILES) (13.9 MILES) **"VAN METRE RANCH ROAD":** On Elkhorn Road, traveling south, you have been in a fenced "biological study area" for several miles. The "Van Metre Ranch Road" angles to the right (southwest) immediately as you go through a fence with a cattle guard, indicating that you are leaving the biological study area. It is a little-traveled road and may be weedy. Drive down this road for 0.6 or 0.7 miles to a place where the right (north) side of the road has been washed out into a deep gully. Park here and explore. This is **one of the best areas on the Carrizo Plain to find LE CONTE'S THRASHERS**, in the saltbush both north and south of where you are parked. SAGE SPARROWS are abundant. ROCK WRENS are common and nest in the banks of the gully. PRAIRIE FALCONS breed in the area.

On [Map 33c](#): the upper right end of the marked route is the Elkhorn Road – "Van Metre Ranch Road" junction, and the left end is at the described parking spot. "Van Metre Ranch Road" continues west past this parking area, but immediately drops into the canyon bottom. It goes down canyon and through the Elkhorn Scarp. In about 0.5 miles, it leaves the wash up a bank, just after (west of) the blue dot shown on Map 33c. You are now at the end of the west section of "Van Metre Ranch Road" as described in section #18 (See [Map 18](#)). Experienced drivers with 4x4 could drive down the wash and meet up with that west section and Soda Lake Road, BUT IT IS ADVISED THAT YOU WALK THE ROAD FIRST TO CHECK ITS CONDITION. There are areas of DEEP sand, and after floods there can be rocks in the road.

6.6 MILES (28.3 MILES) (7.3 MILES) **"THE CROSSOVER ROAD" aka "GRAFFITI TANK ROAD":** Along Elkhorn Road south from "Van Metre Ranch Road" to this intersection there are a number of spots where LECONTE'S THRASHERS are found. This is near the south limit for this species, since saltbush becomes more sparse south of here. [Map 22](#) shows the east (Elkhorn) end of "The Crossover Road" at the top of the marked route on the map. Section #22 describes this road from the west side.

4.1 MILES (32.4 MILES) (3.2 MILES from the junction of Elkhorn Road and Soda Lake Road) **ELKHORN RIDGE ROAD JUNCTION:** This southern end of the Elkhorn Valley is not very good birding. There are only a few big saltbushes, and there are lots of Russian thistles (tumbleweed). Sometimes the tumbleweed piles up so deep in the road that the road is closed. This junction is described in Section 31 and is shown on [Map 31](#) as the top of the marked road. Taking a right here will take you back to the paved section

of Soda Lake Road. Continuing straight ahead on Elkhorn Ridge Road takes you to Rte 58.

(CUYAMA VALLEY AREA)

- 34) **WESTERN CUYAMA VALLEY:** This section only addresses the western end of the Cuyama Valley, and only covers the parts of the valley within San Luis Obispo County. [Map 34a](#) shows the intersection of Rte 166 and Rte 33. The farm fields along Rte 166 and Rte 33 are worth scoping carefully in winter. One might get lucky and find a LONGSPUR in with the thousands of HORNED LARKS. Rte 33 has less traffic and more places to pull off the road to look. All of the Cuyama Valley is good for RAPTORS in the winter.

Driving south on Highway 33 from the 166 junction, there is a small agricultural pond on the right (west) at mile 1.2. Its condition changes frequently, but usually it has water and cattails, and sometimes has muddy edges. Look for TRI-COLORED BLACKBIRDS here and at the ranch. LESSER NIGHTHAWKS are regular here in the summer at dusk. Occasionally SHOREBIRDS are seen here in migration.

Drive another 1.5 miles south on Rte 33, and turn right (west) on Foothill Road (paved). This road follows the county line west. Drive west for 1.5 miles, past the “road closed” sign (when dry) and park just before the Cuyama River. The land from Rte 33 to here on the north side of the road is in SLO County and the land on the south side is Santa Barbara County. In winter the area past the sign may be muddy. The non-farmed area along the east edge of the river is BLM land and is open to the public. (The fence is to keep people from dumping junk and old cars in the area.) This area of saltbush and ephedra is seldom birded. There are records of SAGE THRASHERS here in the winter. It is a remnant of the native vegetation in the valley, and worth checking once in a while. Foothill Road crosses the river at this point and thereafter is in Santa Barbara County on both sides of the road.

RTE 166: “THE OLD FEEDLOT”: On the north side of Rte 166, at approximately mile marker 45.1, there is a pull-off with room for parking and a locked gate. This is the gate used to access the Chimineas Ranch from the south. Walk through the gate and straight ahead (north) up the road, and up onto the bench. There usually are YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIES in the oaks. Explore the weedy old feedlot area for VESPER SPARROWS (winter), LAWRENCE’S GOLDFINCHES, etc. Then walk further up the road to the north to a water tank. Approach the tank quietly; there is a small pond just below it to the east where WHITE-FACED IBIS, DUCKS and SHOREBIRDS have been

seen. (See [Map 34b](#), where Rte 166 is at the bottom of the marked trail and the water tank and pond are at the top.) Note: The feedlot was actively in use as of 8/8/07.

THE END