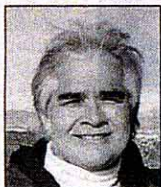


Trolling for eagles on Cachuma Lake

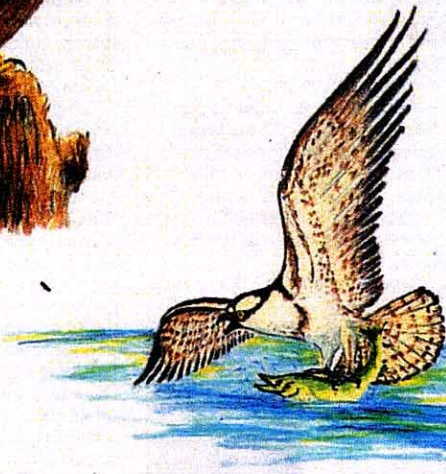
San Juan Capistrano can have its swallows and Hinckley, Ohio, can have its turkey vultures. But for me it's the return of the eagles to Cachuma Lake each winter that makes my holiday season very special.

From November to February and sometimes as late as March, bald eagles, golden eagles, and osprey will call the lake home for the winter. American white pelicans, with their seven-foot wing span, will also spend the winter at Cachuma Lake, while thousands of their smaller feathered cousins will simply pass through on their way south to winter in Central and South America using the Pacific Flyway. For migrating birds from the Arctic, the Pacific Flyway is their Route 66 to a summer vacation.



The Day Tripper

Tony Galvan



© Anthony Galván III

The lake provides an ideal habitat for fish-eating bald eagle and osprey, so it's not uncommon to see bald eagles catching trout or bass in the lake. Even more spectacular is watching an osprey catch a fish and fly off, holding the fish parallel to its body instead of crossways. And if luck is on your side you just might see a bald eagle harassing an osprey in the air, forcing the osprey to drop its fish and then stealing the dropped fish in mid-air!

If you take the cruise in the early spring you may come upon red-tailed hawks, great-horned owls or great blue herons nesting in trees that hang over the lake. Late spring and summer also offer opportunities to see baby brebeches hitching a ride on mom's back. Another visual treat besides a mature bald eagle, with its white head and tail, would be a golden eagle. If you're lucky enough to see one you'll know why this majestic bird has always been associated with royalty.

The two-hour Eagle Cruises run all year round. A cruise in the spring or summer will reward you with spectacular wildflowers in bloom and a chance to see grebes and other waterfowl as they can for their young in the shallow portions of the lake. The fall also provides a chance to see some of the early migrating birds as they begin arriving at the lake.

Cachuma Lake has something to offer everyone year round. Whether you like to hike, bird, fish or just relax, take advantage of this wonderful Santa Barbara County park that is less than an hour away. Remember, the fun of trolling for eagles is the trip itself.

northern latitudes to their summer haunts in Central and South America.

A bonus is that some of these migrating birds decide Cachuma Lake is as good a destination point as any other and decide to spend the winter in our back yard, Santa Barbara County. Who needs to go to Homer, Alaska, when you can see bald eagles right here in Santa Barbara County.

Naturalists at Cachuma Lake have been recording the comings and goings of eagles and other

bird species since the 1980s. Some of these eagles have flown in from as far away as the Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories of Canada, which is more than 2,500 miles north of here! Seems Santa Barbara is a real destination point for more than just people.

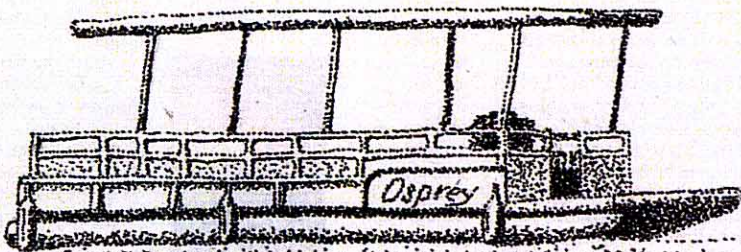
Recent sightings this year around the lake of bald eagles that had been relocated and released on several of the Channel Islands also indicate the species is slowly returning to some of its historical range. That's a good thing.

Counting on water

So, instead of heading north to Homer or the Northwest Territories, the next best place to see eagles close up is along Cachuma Lake's 42 miles of shoreline on the SS Osprey. The 46-foot Osprey is a pontoon tour boat that makes an excellent platform to observe birds and wildlife from the comfort of swivel seats and a covered deck. With two viewing platforms and a shallow draft, it can also get into some of the narrow bays on the lake.

Location, location, location

Cachuma Lake's unique location, along the route of the Pacific Flyway, makes it an ideal place to see eagles and other migrating birds throughout the winter months. The flyway is one of the four major migration routes for waterfowl and other migrating birds in the United States, Canada and Mexico that journey from



Eagle Cruise

The boat is equipped with padded swivel seats, a partially covered deck, viewing platforms, and it is accessible to guests with wheelchairs. There is no minimum age, however, it is recommended that parents only bring children who can tolerate wearing a snug life vest for two hours. There are no restrooms on the boat. Infants must also be confined to an infant life vest, provided by the park.

If you go

- Getting there** : From Santa Barbara take Highway 101 to the San Marcos Pass exit, Highway 154. The park entrance is about 20 miles from this point. From the north, take Highway 101 to Highway 154; Cachuma Lake is about 20 miles east.
- The Park** : Cachuma Lake is a Santa Barbara County park; entry is \$6 per vehicle.
Website: www.sbparks.org/Scripts/ParksDetail.asp?ParkID=2
- The Eagle Cruise** : Reservations are highly recommended and can be made by calling 686-5050 Monday through Friday, and 686-5055 Saturday and Sunday. Two-hour Eagle Cruises run November through February.

Cruises are Wednesday through Sunday mornings from 10 a.m. to noon, and Friday and Saturday afternoons 2-4 p.m.

Cruise fees are \$15 for adults and \$7 for children ages 12 and under.