



Jerry Ting

**White-tailed Kite** (also top cover photo)  
*Elanus leucurus*  
L 17" WS 40"

The pale coloring and graceful flight of this raptor make the white-tailed kite one of our most elegant birds of prey. Formerly known as the black-shouldered kite, the striking black "shoulder" patches on the pale gray wings are a key diagnostic feature on the kite. Kites will sometimes perch on tree limbs or snags, but are not often seen on poles or fences. When hunting, kites hover ("kiting") watchfully until a rodent is sighted. Then, in a rapid descent, the bird drops silently, feet-first onto its prey. At close range with binoculars, you will notice the kite's ruby-red eyes. Kites hunt mostly small rodents, like voles and field mice; less frequently, large insects and lizards are taken. The white-tailed kite is listed by the state as a "fully protected species."



Jerry Ting

**American Kestrel**  
*Falco sparverius*  
L 8" WS 24"

No larger than a western robin, the kestrel is our smallest California falcon. Unlike its larger falcon relatives who perform high-speed dives to snatch other birds out of the air, the kestrel's hunting behavior is more similar to the kite. Hovering in a stationary position, wings flapping rapidly high over a prey site, this bird scans the ground. When potential food (often a large, juicy insect) is spotted, the kestrel dives to the ground to grab it. Preferring mostly insects, kestrels vary their diet with small birds, mice, snakes, and lizards. Look for what appears to be a small hawk that flies toward the top of a pole or branch, landing with two or three bobbing motions of its tail. The male is striking with blue-gray wings and a bright rust-brown back. The female has a rust-brown back and wings. Both sexes have two vertical facial stripes bordering the eyes.

**Burrowing Owl**  
*Athene cunicularia*

L 9" WS 21-24"

You are most likely to find a burrowing owl in a grassy meadow with ground squirrel burrows. This small, round-headed, golden-eyed owl co-exists with ground squirrels, nesting in abandoned burrows. Occasionally, the burrowing owl may be spotted perched on a fence-post or a rock where its long featherless legs make for a striking figure. One of the few owls more likely to be seen during the day, this species has grown increasingly scarce in Northern California due to habitat loss and efforts to eliminate burrowing mammals which, in turn, eliminates nesting habitat. The burrowing owl is now listed by the state as a "species of special concern."



©Jim Dunn

**Turkey Vulture**  
*Cathartes aura*  
L 32" WS 72"

Known to some as the garbage collector of the bird world, the turkey vulture provides a needed service in nature: quick, efficient disposal of carrion. Look for a large dark bird with a featherless, fleshy, red head. During flight, the wings are held at an up-tilted "V" angle and the primary feathers are separated often distinctly enough to count. The two-toned, silver-black underwings are also distinctive in flight. As the turkey vulture tilts and soars effortlessly overhead riding a thermal, keenly attuned for signs and scents of animal carcasses, note the time between wingbeats for demonstration of aerial skill and grace.

**L = Body length from bill tip to tail tip**  
**WS = Wing span**



Jerry Ting

**Northern Harrier**  
*Circus cyaneus*  
L 18" WS 43"

One of the easiest hawks to identify in flight, the harrier (formerly known as the marsh hawk) often flies very low, tilting side-to-side as it cruises over marsh and meadow. This low-flying behavior of the harrier often reveals its most prominent field mark, the distinctive white rump-patch, which can be spotted from a ¼ mile away. Northern harriers are sexually dimorphic. The female is larger and brown, while the smaller male is gray with black wing tips. Because this raptor hunts by sound as well as sight, the harrier has a facial disk, (a circular ridge of feathering around the face) similar to owls, which helps direct sound waves toward its ears. During spring, watch for the spectacular, aerial, courtship display of the male. Nesting usually occurs on the ground in a carefully guarded patch of dense vegetation.



Jerry Ting

**Barn Owl**  
*Tyto alba*  
L 16" WS 42"

This owl has adapted to living near humans by roosting and nesting in human-built structures like old barns or abandoned buildings. Unfortunately, the reduction of hunting habitat in marshes, farms, and ranch lands has reduced the owl's numbers. Also roosting in hollow trees and caves, the barn owl hunts strictly at night for small rodents, but will take snakes, lizards, large insects, and birds. The dark eyes set in a white facial disk, the long legs and pale body of the barn owl give it an unmistakable and eerie appearance.



Jerry Ting

**Golden Eagle**  
*Aquila chrysaetos*  
L 40" WS 88"

A sighting of this majestic, endangered fully protected species is more common in the East Bay Regional Parks than one might expect and is always a breathtaking experience. With a wingpan exceeding seven feet, the golden eagle is hard to mistake for another bird. The East Bay has the highest density of nesting golden eagles anywhere in the world. This eagle can be seen at much closer range as it hunts ground squirrels and other rodents in the fields, meadows, and foothills of our bay area landscape. Look for an all dark bird, much larger than a vulture. Through binoculars the blonde-gold feathers at the nape behind the head can often be seen. Immature birds show prominent white patches in the wings and tail. Golden eagles are famous for their spectacular flight acrobatics during courtship displays.

**Great-Horned Owl**  
*Bubo virginianus*  
L 22" WS 44"

The large "ear-tufts" and huge golden eyes of the great-horned owl which give it a distinctly cat-like appearance can both startle and delight the unsuspecting hiker who spots our most widespread bird of prey. A nocturnal hunter, the eyes of this owl are set within a facial disk which collects and directs sound waves and allows the bird to find its prey in nearly complete darkness. Small mammals, insects, reptiles, and amphibians make up the varied diet of this predator. Because of its minimal sense of smell, skunks are often a preferred meal! Although usually solitary, the great-horned, because of its large size and presence in many habitats is our most commonly seen owl.

Jerry Ting

