

## Bolsa Chica Reserve

### Dec. 30, 2022

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Below is the Itinerary for the Bolsa Chica Birds Photoshoot and a bit of information about the Bolsa Chica Wetlands. There are also area maps on the last page.

Google map to the meeting area (click on Satellite view):

<https://goo.gl/maps/cJK2h7GmfZepvSg29>

We are meeting in the South Parking Lot off Highway 1, south of Rabbit Island on the map (bottom, center). We will meet there at 6:30 am. Dress warmly... it will be a bit on the cold side.

### **Itinerary**

**6:30 am** (Sunrise is at 6:56 am)

We will meet at the South Parking Lot off PCH (just south of Rabbit Island). We will set up our gear, have a short class on bird photography and continue to the Footbridge.

**8:30 am**

Once we are finished at the Footbridge, we will head towards Rabbit Island and the Nesting Area

**10:00 am**

We return to the Footbridge by the parking lot. This will conclude our photoshoot.

You are more than welcome to "hang out" and continue photographing the birds on your own.

### **What To Bring**

Dress warm and in layers, it will be cold at 6:30 am !

A tripod is not absolutely necessary but **HIGHLY** recommended

Lenses in the 200mm – 400mm range are preferred, a 600mm is not too long

Bring lots of media cards for your camera

### **Map of Bolsa Chica area:**

<http://wikimapia.org/#lat=33.6951731&lon=-118.0366373&z=15&l=0&m=s&v=9>

(this is an overview of the area, click on the small square by the footbridge)

### **Links to websites about Bolsa Chica:**

<http://www.pbase.com/xl1ken/bobc091>

[http://trailhiker.smugmug.com/gallery/5649642\\_pMMwJ/3/206692276\\_2eipA](http://trailhiker.smugmug.com/gallery/5649642_pMMwJ/3/206692276_2eipA)

<http://geekhiker.wordpress.com/2009/03/30/hike-bolsa-chica-ecological-reserve/>

# **BOLSA CHICA ECOLOGICAL RESERVE**

**By Richard Mittleman**

## **ACCESS**

The Bolsa Chica Reserve can be accessed at all times and there is no entry fee.

## **AREA LAYOUT**

The Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve is located on the Pacific Coast Highway on the inland side, between Warner and Seapoint Avenues. A free parking lot is located where a footbridge crosses inner Bolsa Bay. The Reserve consists of 785 acres. A sandy trail, elevated roughly five feet at many places, leads through the reserve with opportunities to photograph subjects on the inner bay on one side, subjects at various ponds on the other.

## **WHAT YOU'LL FIND**

With wetlands boasting a reputation for being one of the best birding spots in the United States, the coastal salt marsh is teeming with plant life and wildlife. It attracts migratory birds in scores while in transit to and from South America. As is the nature of shorebirds, low tide is best for photographic opportunities.

Starting mid- to late May, Black Neck Stilts may nest in numerous locations along the loop trail and are very accessible for photographing. There are also some nesting American Avocets, but they are not generally as close to the trail as the stilt nests are. During the summer months Bolsa Chica provides a safe haven for five nesting colonies of terns, including the Elegant Tern, which distinguishes Bolsa Chica as one of only four places in the world where it nests. Other species such as Beldings Savannah Sparrows, Peregrine Falcons, Brown Pelicans, Light-Footed Clapper Rails, and Black Skimmers can also be found at the Reserve. In addition to the usual shorebirds there may be appearances by Common, Pacific, and possibly Red-throated Loons in the Bolsa inner Bay. During winter months numerous varieties of waterfowl and shorebirds are present and feeding on the Reserve.

Because the loop trail is elevated above the water areas it is not always easy to get images of shorebirds from a low vantage point, but it is possible at times and in certain areas. Shooting from the bridge is often rewarding as the terns and skimmers regularly fly relatively low and directly over the bridge. Loons, grebes and a wide variety of other birds will swim very close to and often under the bridge. The drawback to shooting from the wooden bridge is that it shakes with frequent foot traffic of other outdoor enthusiasts. When shooting into the bay from the bridge you are, of course, shooting down on your subjects, but a long lens and a subject that's not too close can help reduce the apparent angle.

## **LIGHT**

The best route to walk in the morning starts across the wooden footbridge and onto the loop trail. The sun will be at your back for shooting into the bay which will be on your left and the light is on the right until you reach the tide gate where the trail loops back towards the bridge.

In the late afternoon walking the same half of the trail allows you to shoot into the ponds on the right hand side where stilts usually nest in spring. At the tide gate, which is where the trail starts its loop back to the bridge, the late afternoon sun is at your back and it is an excellent spot in the spring and summer for shooting hovering and diving Elegant and Forster's Terns and Black Skimmers.

Further along the loop trail past the tide gate the sun is at your back during your return to the bridge and is excellent for shooting into the bay, which is on your left.

Being situated near the ocean, Bolsa Chica Reserve often has its own unique weather pattern. In June the phenomenon known locally as "June gloom" is typical: the sun frequently is not out until after noon and the sky remains overcast at Bolsa Chica. It is quite common for the sun to be shining one mile inland yet be overcast near the beach. Internet weather forecasts for Huntington Beach are often not indicative of the actual conditions at Bolsa Chica, especially before noon.

**The Walkbridge** - Park in the little parking lot on PCH (Pacific Coast Highway), across from the Bolsa Chica State Beach entrance. There's a long wooden walkbridge that starts by the parking lot and crosses the long "lake" there. This lake is actually a muted tidal pond, so the tide only goes up and down about a foot there. From the footbridge you can almost always see **gulls, terns, great egrets, snowy egrets,** and often **pelicans**. In the winter, there are usually some duck flocks within sight. There are dozens of other birds often seen here. In the late spring (April- June), walk about 20 feet out on the bridge, look to the left, and stand quietly for a few minutes, and you're likely to see a dinner plate sized baby **stingray**. You may also see a 3' shark and **sea hares** in the shallow water there. Patience is the key to seeing the stingrays. There are also ground squirrels often seen in the parking lot, but don't feed them, even though they're cute.

**The Causeway** - This is about a mile walk from either the PCH (south) parking lot, or the Warner parking lot. From the Warner parking lot, walk up Warner over the bridge and take the trail to your right. That trail parallels the inland side of the big "lake". When you get near the trees, there's the lookout point with benches and a wildlife chart, as well as the nearby kiosk showing history of Bolsa Chica. There are **cottontail rabbits, ground squirrels, fence lizards,** and often **hummingbirds** in this area. Looking towards the ocean from the lookout point, there's a dirt road just to your left that separates the "lakes". That road is the causeway. Walk down that causeway towards the ocean. On your right there are almost always several wading birds, like **great egrets, snowy egrets, willets,** and **great blue herons,** in sight, and flocks **cormorants** swimming, along with various kinds of ducks in the winter. There are also **oyster beds** visible at low tide, and rarely you may see a stingray in the water.

The first waterway on your right is the end of the canal that stretches several miles inland. If you look into the water in the canal from the causeway, you may see a school of fish, each about a foot long, these are **yellowfin croakers**. There are usually ducks in the canal in the winter, as well. You may see **sea hares** here as well, which are football-sized slug-like things with ruffles on their backs.

If you walk further down the causeway, towards the ocean, you come to the muted pond on your left. If the tide is coming in, there will be **gulls, terns** and often **brown pelicans** hovering over the left side of the causeway (when facing the ocean). If the tide is going out, they'll be hovering over the right side. The reason these birds are hovering is because there are **thousands of small fish** near the surface. When the tide is coming in, on the left side, you'll see thousands of small fish, mostly fingerling-size. If you keep watching, you can often see **white sea bass**, about two feet long, swimming through the schools of smaller fish. Once in a while you can see a **baby shark**, usually 1 1/2 to two feet long swim by. This is in addition to the hundreds of birds swarming around, feeding on fish, when the tide comes in.

In the winter, head inland on the left canal bank, and you'll probably see some additional species of ducks both in the canal and in the small ponds on your left.

We will meet at the Parking Lot at 6:30 am (bottom center).



Google View of Parking Lot

