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SOARING FLIGHTS, AMAZING SIGHTS ARE NOW IN SEASON In The Heart of The Pacific Flyway, Santa Maria Valley Is Birder's Paradise *Local Birding Map/Guide Reveals Avian Hot Spots for Winter and Spring*

SANTA MARIA, CA— Tourists aren't the only ones flocking to the beautiful Santa Maria Valley this winter and spring. Indeed, here in the heart of California's Central Coast—along what is known as the Pacific Flyway and the Central Coast Birding Trail—the skies, beaches and lagoons are abundant with resident and migratory birds. And now, to help sort out all the sightings in this birder's paradise, the Santa Maria Valley Visitor & Convention Bureau is offering a free, extensive *Santa Maria Valley Birding Map*. The VCB also offers the book, *A Birder's Guide to the Santa Maria Valley*, for \$10.

Birds—and birders—are drawn to the Santa Maria Valley for many reasons. "This valley creates an opening in the coastal landscape where a wide variety of passerines, waterfowl and shorebirds seek shelter, food and rest as they continue their seasonal migration," says Gene Lynch, author of *A Birder's Guide to the Santa Maria Valley*. "With its gradual transitional geography and varied habitat types, the valley contains an abundance of bird life and in certain seasons an energetic birder can identify more than 100 species in a single day."

The valley's "migrant traps," or patches of rich foliage or mud-flats, often attract exotic eastern, Mexican or Eurasian birds en route from their faraway homes. Santa Maria Valley is also the farthest reaching range limit for a number of coastal California species including the Yellow-billed Magpie, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Wrentit, Nuttall's White-crowned Sparrow, Belding's Savannah Sparrow and the California Towhee.

In the **City of Santa Maria** alone, quality birding is available at Black and Betteravia roads, where Golden Eagles have been spotted. Rarities such as Migrant Warblers have been seen at **Waller Park** while the Winter Wren has been found at **Oso Flaco Lake**. Other key spots include **Preisker Park**, home to the Great-tailed Grackle; the wonderfully scenic **Suey Creek Road** where Blue Grosbeaks are spied; and **Corralitos Canyon**, where the White-Tailed Kite and Tricolored Blackbird are spotted.

Birders who make advance reservations may take advantage of the **Waterfowl Natural Resource Area** at Vandenburg Air Force Base by calling 805-606-6804. Since opening in 1994 this former Air Force water treatment plant site, known as "the ponds," has become one of the favorite birding habitats in the region with more than 240 species identified.

Largely undiscovered compared with other popular eco-tourism destinations, Santa Maria Valley's **Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Complex** also remains a prominent Central Coast wildlife refuge and destination for birding and other wildlife spotting. The Dunes Complex spans 18 miles of shoreline and offers 1,400 individual species of flora and fauna as well as numerous lagoons and lakes.

The free *Santa Maria Valley Birding Map*, birding tours, information on Santa Maria Valley's **annual Birding Rally** each October and *A Birder's Guide to the Santa Maria Valley* (\$10) are available to the public through the Santa Maria Valley Visitor & Convention Bureau at 800-331-3779 ext. 851 or www.santamaria.com.

Serving the greater Santa Maria Valley in the heart of California's Central Coast, the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau is a nonprofit association that facilitates local tourism and provides information on the region's many attractions and visitor services. Famed for its fine wines, natural wonders, agricultural heritage and flavorful barbecue, the Santa Maria Valley offers a broad range of cultural, sporting and historical experiences. For information on lodging, dining, tours, attractions and events, please contact the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau at (800) 331-3779, or visit www.santamaria.com.