

## The Birds

Van Norden is rich in bird life. It is one of the largest wetlands and wet meadow systems on the west slope of the Sierra making it one of the best Sierra birding areas. Of the more than 100 species of birds on Donner Summit, most can be found on or around the meadow. An early morning walk near the shoreline can be dramatic as the mists rise unveiling many different bird species floating placidly on the lake or flying overhead.

Ducks and geese stop over in summer, some resting during longer journeys and others taking up residence, building nests and hatching chicks. There are many "special status" species visiting the lake as well as the endangered Willow Flycatcher.

American White Pelicans rest on the way to and from Salt Lake. A lucky birdwatcher may get to see a flock spiral down to land on the lake.



Raptors of various kinds glide over the meadow on the hunt for meals. Osprey, Red-tailed Hawks, Golden and even Bald Eagles can be seen sailing overhead. An amazing experience is to see a Bald Eagle snatch a fish from the talons of an Osprey.

Coyote prowl the edges of the lake but birds are clever, plac-

ing their nests on the little islands or well hidden in the grassy tufts, shrubs and nearby trees.



## **Summit Valley** partial list of bird species How many can you find?

Thrushes Canada Goose Towhees Ducks Sparrows Quail Tanagers Grouse Grosbeaks Herons Blackbirds Vultures Finches Osprey Wood Warblers Hawks Eagles

Falcons

Plovers

Pigeons

Swifts

Sandpiper

Nighthawks

Kingfishers

Flycatchers

Swallows

Titmice

Chickadees

Nuthatches

Woodpeckers

Jays and Crows

Hummingbirds





Seen Here: Merganser and chicks, upper left; small songbird, left; Bald Eagle, and White Pelicans, above.

### The Wildflowers

Among Summit Valley's riches are its many species of wildflowers. One reason for this richness is the diverse habitats or niches: the forests surrounding the meadow, the soggy meadows as well as the drier parts, the meandering stream banks, and the dry rocky habitats. Each habitat has its own variety of species, a display that unfolds as spring moves into summer. One very spe-

cial spring wildflower is the Camas Lily (right), which blooms in very soggy sunny meadows. It was gathered by Tahoe's native people as a staple and enjoyed for the sweetness of its bulbs, which were eaten after being roasted in earthen ovens. Creeping Phlox is also an early bloomer. It carpets dry, rocky habitats with its white to lavender flowers.



Be sure to kneel down to inhale their sweet fragrance. During the summer the niches grow and shrink as the lake recedes, leaving less marshy areas drier to support other species. The Crimson Columbine (below), with its red and yellow flowers, nods gracefully in drying forest habitats, as well as in sunny wet meadows and on stream banks. Look closely and you may notice a tiny hole in the swollen tips of the flower. These are created by honey bees that bite the flower to sip its sweet nectar.

A fascinating exploration is to hike the Pacific Crest Trail from Donner Pass to the source of the Yuba River's south fork, which begins as a spring that seeps out of the

ground below the west-side slope of Roller Pass, above the Sugar Bowl Ski Resort.

The Summit Valley's wildflowers are truly a gift. They attract

Van Norden

reservoirs.

insects, birds, and other wildlife as well as people of all ages, with their beauty and easy accessibility.

Wildflower photos here are courtesy of Julie Carville.

Lake Van Norden was named for Charles Van

ing Dam. The canal company supplied water

and electricity to farmers, miners, and towns.

flumes, canals, and pipes along the CPRR route

Norden. His brother, Warner, had invested

in the South Yuba Canal Co. and Spauld-

Eventually the company had 450 miles of

downhill to the Central Valley, as well as 30

The Van Nordens were a wealthy New York

family that could trace their American ances-

tors back to 1640 and were involved in many

commercial ventures. Warner's brother,

Charles, was a scholar, writer, student, phi-

losopher, and litterateur of "more than ordi-

nary ability." He was also a Congregational

resident director of the canal company and

president of Central California Electric Co.

minister. In 1893 he came to California as the

#### Butterflies discovered the attractions of Summit Valley eons before the Native Americans, the wagon trains or the railroad. Donner Pass is a low pass with lots of ecological diversity, making it a good home for many species. There are 155 species of Sierra butterflies. 115 can be found on Donner Pass and almost all of them can

be found in and around Summit Valley. The species present at any one time vary depending on which plants are flowering. Butterflies are heliothermic, needing the sun's heat to fly, so look in

sunny areas.

The Butterflies



Each species has Photo: Kim Davis & Mike Stangeland been evolutionarily engineered.

Their tongues and leg lengths match their host plants or "adult nectar sources."

One iconic Summit species is the Gray Blue Agriades Podarce (above). The males are gray blue and the females a rich brown. Its host is the Shooting Star, Dodecatheon Jefreyi. The plant can be found on the edges of streams meandering through the upper half of the meadow.

Best Sierra butterfly website: http://buttefly.ucdavis.edu.



www.Sugarbowl.com



**Royal Gorge** www.royalgorge.com



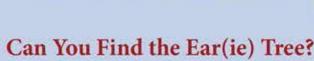




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It's just off the old Lincoln Highway, the nation's first transcontinental highway, in Summit Valley.

39° 19.185'N 120° 22.019'W



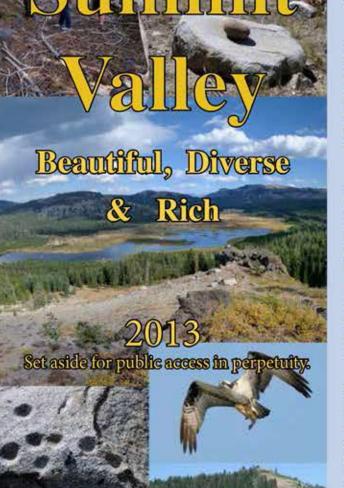
www.tdlandtrust.org





Above: Pine Marten

Front Panel clockwise from top left: exploring the Emigrant Trail, White Pelicans, Metate or large Native American grinding slick, Summit Valley from Soda Springs Ski Hill, Osprey with fish, kayaking on the upper Yuba River, resident Beaver, Cupules (Native American rock art, possibly mystical each approx. 2" in diam.)



Summit Valley is on Donner Summit just

two miles east of the Soda Springs exit

from I-80 on Donner Pass Rd.

## **SUMMIT VALLEY -**OPEN FOR EXPLORATION

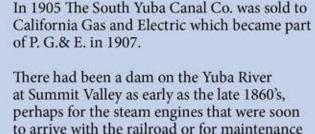
Summit Valley is exquisite. It is important biologically and historically. The geology is fascinating.

Native Americans occupied Summit Valley in summer for thousands of years. The first wagon trains to reach California with wagons came through Summit Valley as did the first transcontinental railroad, first transcontinental highway, first transcontinental telephone line, and the first transcontinental air route.

The public access to Summit Valley is the result of an extraordinary community effort raising \$10.5 million for the purchase of 2,900 acres of Donner Summit in just a few months. The entire Summit community joined in contributing: little kids sold cookies, there were public events such as the concert in the abandoned railroad tunnel, and there was good old-fashioned fund raising. The successful acquisition was completed by the Truckee Donner Land Trust in December, 2012.

Now that Summit Valley is open to the public in perpetuity, people can enjoy its riches: cross country skiing, birding, mountain biking, lepidoptery, hiking, wild flowers, photography, and history exploration.

This brochure is an introduction to Summit Valley.



to arrive with the railroad or for maintenance of the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. which ran right through the valley. Lake Van Norden Dam was built in the summer of 1890 and enlarged in about 1915. The dam was eventually breached in 1976 because the cost of enlarging it and making it earthquake safe was too much

for P. G.& E..

# Thanks for the Help:

Dr. Ted Beedy, birds Dr. George Lamson, photography Julie Carville, wild flowers, author: Hiking Tahoe's Wildflower Trails Dr. Art Shapiro, butterflies





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Donner Summit **Businesses Sup**porting this Introduction to Summit Valley