



PARKS DIVISION
610 Mission Canyon Road • Santa Barbara, CA 93105
(805) 568-2461 • FAX (805) 568-2459
www.SBParks.org

P R E S S R E L E A S E

News Media Contact:

Liz Gaspar
Park Naturalist
Santa Barbara County Parks
(805) 688-4515
Lgaspar@sbparks.org

PARKS No. 13-024

November 23, 2013
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Eagle Season” is here! **Bald Eagle Pair and More at Cachuma Lake**

When visitors come to Cachuma Lake from near or far, a goal many share is to enjoy the beauty of nature that Cachuma Lake has to offer. Whether fishing from boat or shore, strolling on a nature walk, or simply relaxing in a campground chair, the splendor can be found all over.

One of the activities our visitors can experience is the Nature Cruise. Passengers come aboard a pontoon named *The Osprey* where they can relax in comfortable, swivel-seat, padded chairs and take in the panoramic views of the Santa Ynez Valley as well as the picturesque San Rafael wilderness. Each passenger is provided with a loaner pair of binoculars for the ride. Over the course of two hours, a Park Naturalist guides the boat around the lake, while providing information on the local surroundings, flora and fauna, geology, and cultural history of the area.

The cruises are offered year-round, and changing seasons bring diversity. The first of November officially marks the beginning of “Eagle Season”, and the name of the Wildlife Cruise appropriately is changed to the Eagle Cruise. Already this year as early as August, bald eagle sightings have been frequent. The regal resident pair is seen soaring from towering heights and perched in favorite oak trees, at times paired together, other times seeking solitude. Each encounter is an authentic experience of its own.

Eagle sightings are amazing, and in addition, there is still an ample amount of wildlife to be appreciated. Due to a couple of dry winters in the recent years, the water level is over forty feet low. Many of the creeks and streams around the periphery are dry, forcing wildlife from their parched watering holes right to the edge of Cachuma Lake for refreshment. Herds of deer have been a common sighting over the past few months. While watching some young bucks one afternoon, passengers got to view a skunk, which was in the grass just a few feet away. During another cruise, a lone coyote was witnessed trotting in the Santa Cruz Bay area, and so were fifteen wild pigs later that week, which are both rare and special sightings.

During the fall season, we also begin to witness marvelous migration. Waterfowl from as far north as Alaska begin to make their way down the Pacific Flyway and find a sanctuary here. In addition to the commonly seen mallards, herons, and grebes, we are beginning to see other visitors. Osprey, also known as “fish eagles”, have been seen both perched in trees and hunting for fish above the lake, at times crashing feet first into the water to grasp fish with their impressive talons. In the beginning of October, green-winged teals were spotted, as well as a “cackling goose”, which is a subspecies of a Canada goose. Small and dainty eared grebes are now turning up too. For a couple of weeks in October, only two

white pelicans were seen, but by mid-month, about fifteen more flew in, and just a few days later, we counted over thirty. Passengers were quite delighted when the flock gracefully soared by, moving in unison. Other recent bird sightings include belted kingfishers, peregrine falcons, American kestrels, red-tailed hawks, northern flickers, hundreds of American coots, a pair of northern harriers and common loons arrived this week too. In the coming months we'll be looking for wood ducks in their dazzling plumage, as well as buffleheads, teals, shovelers and mergansers.

All of this can be enjoyed from aboard the *Osprey*, Cachuma Lake's 36-foot pontoon tour boat. Park Naturalists guide two hour Eagle Cruises, Friday through Sunday morning 10am-12pm and Friday and Saturday afternoon 2pm-4pm, November through February. Reservations are strongly recommended and can be made by calling (805) 686-5050 Monday through Friday and (805) 686-5055 Saturday and Sunday. Visitors can also make reservations in person by going to the main Cachuma Lake park office. Cruise fees are \$15 for adults and \$7 for children ages 12 and under (Sorry, no children under 4). For guests who are not camping, park entry is \$10 per vehicle. In the coming months we will likely experience cooler temperatures, a wealth of wildlife, and with hope, some rainy days. Come on a cruise and see for yourself!





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