One Truckee River **Teachers Guide:**

Wildlife and Plants Along the Truckee River

Reno/Sparks

Goal

To help teachers and students learn about local wildlife and plant species located on the Truckee River. Our goal is to encourage students to learn and care for their local watershed and engage in citizen science activities.

About this Guide

This guide to the wildlife and plants of the Truckee River covers the section of river located between the west side of Reno and east side of Sparks. The focus of the guide is on the native and non-native species that are found in areas of natural habitat in and along the banks of the river. Ornamental plants, such as trees and flowers planted in parks, are not included.

This teacher's guide was produced by One Truckee River (<u>onetruckeeriver.com</u>), with help from Truckee River Guide (<u>truckeeriverguide.org</u>) and various other local photographers. One Truckee River is a collaboration of public and private partners working together to ensure a healthy, thriving, sustainable river and an engaged community. Truckee River Guide is an online guide to the plants and wildlife of the Truckee River, and a citizen science project aimed at documenting the presence and location of species that are present in and along the river throughout the year.

Citizen Science: Help document Truckee River species

One Truckee River and Truckee River Guide welcome participation from teachers and students in the effort to document local plants and wildlife. To contribute species observations to an interactive map of Truckee River plants and wildlife (<u>truckeeriverguide.org/map</u>), please record and submit the following information through the observation form on the Truckee River Guide website:

- Date
- Time
- Species

- Number of animals/plants seen (if known; ID help is available upon request)
- Notes
- Location (Example: Idlewild Park)
- Photographs



The non-native species symbol indicates species which were introduced or unintentionally released in Nevada. Included are non-native species that can often be considered a nuisance or invasive species depending on their population size and if they cause harm to the native community.





Trees



Black Cottonwood

- Simple leaves without toothed edges
 - Live in higher elevation habitats of the Truckee River (most common between Lake Tahoe and Reno)



Red Willow

(PT) Long and narrow shiny leaves, dark colored bark One of the first trees to have leaves in the spring



Fremont Cottonwood

- PT Heart-shaped leaves with toothed edges
 - Live in lower elevation habitats of the Truckee River (most common between Reno and Pyramid Lake)



Incense-Cedar

PT

Has small scale-like leaves that look like needles Can live to be 500 years old⁰



Russian Olive



핟 Olive-like seeds

Great competitor for water and nutrients and chokes out native plants



Siberian Elm



Small leaves with toothed edges

During the spring, look for its many seed pods

Shrubs



Rubber Rabbitbrush

PT Yellow flowers with flexible or rubber-like stem

Pollen may cause allergic reactions



Shrub Willows (Multiple Species)

PT Simple leaves

> Several species of willows are present along the Truckee River



Golden Currant

PT

Lobed leaves

Yellow flowers appear along the Truckee River in FF March and April



Big Sagebrush PT Leaves are soft and trident-shaped State flower of Nevada



Coyote Willow

- - **PT** Long silver colored leaves
 - Native American tribes used the stems for basketry²



Silver Buffaloberry



Long needle-like thorns on branches

Berries are a great source of food for wildlife

Shrubs



Serviceberry

P Leaves are only toothed on the tip of the leaf Has edible berries that attract birds



Chokecherry

- **PT** Long leaves with very small toothed edges
- Has a scented gland under the leaf stem FF







Red stem

Native American tribes used the twigs for toothbrushes³



Woods' Rose

PT Red colored stems with thorns

Its flowers are pollinated by insects, and seeds are dispersed by birds and mammals⁴



Thinleaf Alder



Female flowers look like tiny pinecones

Roots have bacteria which trap nitrogen for the FF alder to use (nitrogen-fixer)⁵

Wildflowers/Plants



Showy Milkweed

Pink star-shaped flower clusters PT

Insects absorb milkweed toxins to be distasteful to predators⁶



Narrowleaf Milkweed

Long, narrow leaves

The leaves, stems and nectar of both milkweeds provides food and habitat for Monarchs throughout their life cycle



Common Yarrow

РТ

Fern-like leaves branching off of the hairy stem Provides nectar for butterflies



Dogbane (Indian Hemp)

- PT Tiny white flowers and red stems
 - Used by Native American tribes for weaving and basketry



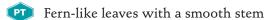
Tall Whitetop

- - Clustered white flowers

A noxious weed which means it can be harmful to agriculture



Poison Hemlock



Blooms from May to July

Caution: Poisonous don't pick!

Wildflowers/Plants



Smooth horsetail

PT Stems have many joints marked by dark bands Existed before dinosaurs



White sagebrush (wormwood)

PT Lobed leaves with a slight white coloring

Native American tribes used it to make dream pillows to bring good dreams



Stinging Nettle

- Green or brown cluster of flowers
- FF Has similar looking leaves to mint

Caution: Stinging hairs cause a burning feeling



Musk Thistle

- **PT** Lobed spiny leaves
 - Can be called a nodding thistle because of the way its flower droops over



Curlycup Gumweed

- Sticky leaves and stem РТ
 - The University of Nevada, Reno is researching its potential as a biofuel



Yellow Sweetclover

- PT
 - Three small leaves per stem
 - (FF)Important nectar source for bees

Birds



Common Goldeneye

- **PT** Yellow eyes and males have green heads with white cheeks
 - On the river between November March



Common Merganser



핻 Long narrow orange bill and females have brown spiky feathers on the head

Baby mergansers can sit on the mothers back while she swims



Mallard

- 😰 Female is mottled brown and the male has a green head with white neck ring
 - Can sleep with 1 eye open to watch for predators⁷



American Coot White bill and red eyes PT

Needs long running takeoffs to fly⁸



Red-tailed Hawk

P Dark brown stripe on chest and under wings and possible red tail

They attack prey by diving from above or catching them in the air¹⁰



Canada Goose



Black head with white cheeks Migrate north in "V" formations⁹

Birds



Great Blue Heron

Long curved neck and a sturdy yellow bill
 Nest in colonies called "rookeries"¹¹



Black-crowned Night Heron

😰 Black head and back

Take care of any chick in its nest even if it is not their own¹²



Northern Flicker

- PT Red cheeks and black spots on belly and wings
 - Ants are their main food source which they grab from the ground with their long tongue¹³



Downy Woodpecker

- 😰 Red spot on the back of the head
 - Don't sing but they do call and drum loudly on wood¹⁴



Brewer's Blackbird



Black feathers and yellow eyes

Can nest in groups of up to 100 birds¹⁵



Black-billed Magpie

핟 Long black tail

Picks ticks (insects) off of large mammals such as deer¹⁶

Birds



Steller's Jay

- Black spiky feathers on top of the head
- Can mimic birds and other animals including squirrels, cats, dogs and chickens¹⁷



Belted Kingfisher

White around neck and females have an orange chest

(FF) As nestlings they have acidic stomachs that can digest bones, scales, and shells¹⁸



Western Scrub Jay

- Blue head, wings and tail (PT)
 - Help deer by standing on their backs and eating parasites19



European Starling



PT Feathers tipped with tan color

Can mimic vocals of other bird species²¹



American Robin

Orange colored belly PT

Feeds more on earthworms in the morning and fruit in the afternoon²⁰



House Sparrow

- PT
 - Orange brown coloring with a black eye stripe

Takes dust baths, much like taking a water bath but with soil instead²²

Mammals



Desert cottontail

- Large white cotton-like tail and ears with very little hair
 - Most active during the early morning or evening²³



California ground squirrel Brownish fur with cream specks

Use cheek pouches to store extra food²⁴



Raccoon

- Black mask over eyes and furry ringed tail
 - Sensitive hands which helps them locate food at night



Striped skunk P Black and white stripe Strong sense of smell but poor eyesight

Mule deer

- Mule-like ears and white tails with black tips
- FF Mothers hide babies in vegetation while searching for food



Mustang

Can have different hair color but look for hooves, mane, and tail

Wild horses are not solitary animals, they live in groups called herds

10

Mammals



Mountain Lion

- PT Tan coat and a black tip on the tail
 - Can jump higher than a basketball hoop



Coyote

- Gray coat with tan legs, belly, mouth, and ears PT
 - Can run up to 25 to 30 miles per hour²⁵



American Black Bear

- **PT** Color ranges from cinnamon to chocolate brown to black
 - Have a great sense of smell²⁶



Muskrat

PT Thick, dark rat-like tail

Plant eater. Fur looks dry after getting wet due to longer oily waterproof hairs



American Beaver

- PT
 - Large paddle-like tail and orange teeth
 - Plant eater that has a close family, children stay with parents for 2 years after they are born²⁷

American Mink

- 🖭 Can look similar to muskrats but instead of a ratlike tail they have furry tails
 - Meat eater. Fur looks wet due to shorter oily waterproof hairs

Fish



Lahontan Redside

Red or orange stripe on the side
 FP Found in schools²⁸



Tahoe Sucker

PT Downward facing mouth and males have bright red stripe

FF Important source of food for birds at Pyramid Lake's Anaho Island²⁹



Lahontan Cutthroat Trout

- P Olive colored with scattered black spots
- F Reintroduced to Pyramid Lake after becoming locally extinct



Rainbow Trout



- P Red stripe and spots on dorsal fin
 - Native cutthroat trout populations declined in the Truckee River after rainbow trout was introduced³⁰



Mountain Whitefish

- **PT** Silver or white sides and belly
 - Prefer rivers to lakes but do live in Lake Tahoe²⁹



Brown Trout

- Brown or black spots
 - Introduced to the U.S. from Germany³¹

Reptiles



Western Pond Turtle

- **PT** Brown or black coloring and possible yellow coloring on head and legs
- Western pond turtles can be found near the river FF》 at McCarran Ranch Preserve



Western Fence Lizard

PT Blue belly and throat with spiny scales

May be observed doing "pushups" to defend territories³²



Western Terrestrial Garter Snake Yellow stripe down center of the back PT Live along the entire Truckee river³³



Western Aquatic Garter Snake

- Do not have a stripe on the center of the back PT
- Likes to be in the water but can be seen sun bathing on land



Northern Rubber Boa



PT Brown coloring with a cream colored belly

Rubber boas are good swimmers and climbers³⁴



Western Yellow-Bellied Racer

Multi-colored

Holds its head and neck above the ground when moving to search for prey³⁴

Reptiles



Gopher Snake

- Light colored with dark spots or blotches
 - When in danger the gopher snake vibrates the tip of its tail to look like a rattlesnake³⁴



Western Toad

- Brown skin with dark blotches
 - Bullfrogs eat this native species³⁵



Pacific Chorus (Tree) Frog

- Green skin and black slits over eyes PT
 - Are known for the chorus or loud noises they make



Leopard Frog P Dark round spots

These were once common in Nevada, but now populations in many areas are in decline³⁶



Bullfrog

- **PT** Green face and brown spotted skin
 - Can eat whatever they can fit in their mouth including birds, lizards and snakes³⁵

Insects



Water Strider

- Six legs: four long and two short
 - Body covered with water repellent hairs which allow them to move by striding across the top of water



Western Boxelder Bug

P Black body with an orange outline

Found in large groups but they rarely damage the trees they eat



Monarch Butterfly

P Orange and black wings

As caterpillars they only eat milkweed plants



Western Tiger Swallowtail

- PP Yellow and black wings
 - As caterpillars they eat cottonwood and willow trees



Vivid Dancer Damselfly

Blue with black stripes

Sits with its wings folded back to its body



Dragonfly

Can be different colors and has a thicker abdomen than damselflies

FP Looks similar to the damselfly but sits with its wings straight out to the side

Insects



Ladybug

P Red wings with black spots

(FF) Larvae are fierce predators that eat aphids (garden pests)



Bumblebee

Large fuzzy black and yellow body sometimes with orange or white coloring

FF Are native to North America unlike honey bees and live in hives

Photo Credits/Attributions

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Sean Shea: Mountain lion

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Kelsey Fitzgerald: All trees and shrubs, rest of the wildlife/plants and birds, Lahontan cutthroat trout, leopard fog

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