

Restoring streamside forests helps songbirds survive the winter in California's Central Valley

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This is a Lincoln's Sparrow, a songbird that winters in riparian forests in California's Central Valley. This species benefits from streamside habitat restoration. Credit: Tom Grey

A new study by PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO) and the National Aviary finds that restoring floodplain forests in the Central Valley of California helps songbirds survive through the winter, a finding previously substantiated only for summer nesting birds.

The floodplain of California's Central Valley is rich with streamside forests of willows, cottonwoods, oaks, and sycamores. Each summer, these forests are alive with the sounds of singing songbirds, but what may be surprising to some is that these same forests help migratory

songbirds survive the winter. Birds from Alaska and Canada fly about 2,400 miles each year to winter in the forests of the Central Valley. Their survival is dependent upon having enough healthy habitats available.

"We often focus on the importance of floodplain forests for songbirds that nest in the spring and summer," said PRBO avian ecologist Mark Dettling, "but this is the first study to show that restored forests also provide habitat for wintering songbirds in the Central Valley."

The study, published in the journal *Conservation Biology*, found that songbirds generally prefer restored forests equally to existing older forests. But some species, including Lincoln's and White-crowned [Sparrows](#), were found in higher numbers in restored forests.

"We know that our Central Valley floodplains provide vital habitat for waterfowl, [salmon](#), and our breeding and wintering songbirds." explained Dr. Nat Seavy, Research Director for the [Central Valley](#) Group at PRBO, "This study provides the type of information we need to help manage our flood plains for the many benefits they provide – to birds and to people."

In addition to creating wildlife [habitat](#), restoring streams and rivers provides multiple benefits for human communities including slowing down flood waters and replenishing underground aquifers. River restoration also keeps our waterways cool and clear, helps our fisheries thrive, and provides people with the opportunity to enjoy and appreciate nature.

More information: Latta, S. C., C. A. Howell, M. D. Dettling, and R. L. Cormier. 2012. Use of data on avian demographics and site persistence during overwintering to assess quality of restored riparian habitat. *Conservation Biology* 26(3):482-492.

[onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10...012.01828.x/abstract](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/1111.012.01828.x/abstract)

Provided by PRBO Conservation Science

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