

## About Coyote Creek

The Coyote Creek watershed is the largest in Santa Clara County, collecting water from 322 square miles and 16 creeks in the valley between the Guadalupe River and the Diablo Mountains. The creek extends for over 30 miles from Morgan Hill to Milpitas and empties into the San Francisco Bay.

Historically, the landscape around Coyote Creek was dominated by sycamore woodlands, riparian scrub, and oak woodlands. The creek flowed seasonally, exposing gravel beds during dry periods.

Agricultural development in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century led to drainage ditches and channelizing the creek, increasing the flow, transforming open woodlands into denser riparian forest, and reducing the width of vegetation supported by periodic flooding.

Amid housing and business developments, Coyote Creek is affected by trash and pollution, yet sustains a variety of life. The creek follows most of its original route, giving it high potential for restoration.

### Bringing Back the Steelhead

Coyote Creek was once spawning ground for steelhead, an anadromous form of rainbow trout that is born in freshwater and spends part of its life in the ocean. Steelhead need gravel beds and cool, clean water in order to spawn. Dams blocking migration routes and loss of spawning habitat have threatened populations in California.

Restoring steelhead to Coyote Creek is one of the missions of the Santa Clara County Creek Coalition.



### 10. Great Blue Heron\*

*Ardea herodias*



These large grayish-blue birds nest just north of Montague Expressway. You might see herons hunting in the creek, slowly stalking their prey and striking in an instant. Their smaller relatives, snowy and great egrets, are also frequently spotted here.

### 11. Yellow-Rumped Warbler\*

*Setophaga coronata*



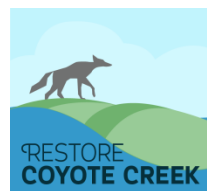
In the winter, flocks of these common warblers often forage for insects and berries in the trees, recognizable by the bright yellow patch on their rumps. In the spring, they return to their breeding grounds in the north.

### 12. Black Phoebe\*

*Sayornis nigricans*



Black phoebes are commonly spotted near water and can be seen at Coyote Creek year round. You might see this black and white bird sallying from its perch to snatch insects midair. Black phoebes build nests from mud, often under the eaves of buildings.



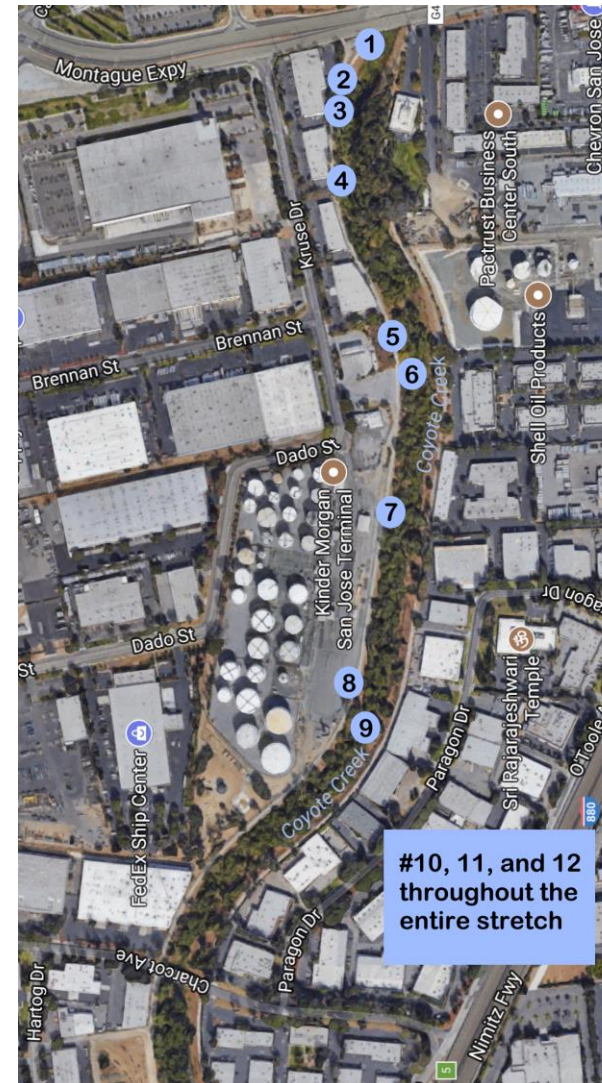
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Visit [sccreeks.org](http://sccreeks.org) to download other brochures highlighting selected plants and wildlife along Coyote Creek.

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## Tour Map



#10, 11, and 12 throughout the entire stretch

The self-guided tour begins at Montague Expressway and heads south toward Charcot.

The numbers indicate the approximate location of where you will first encounter each species during the walk.

- \* Native species
- \* Non-native species

# Self-Guided Tour of Coyote Creek

From Montague Expressway to Charcot Avenue



Want to help clean up your local creek? Get involved with volunteer opportunities and other events with the Santa Clara County Creeks Coalition, Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful, and the South Bay Clean Creeks Coalition.



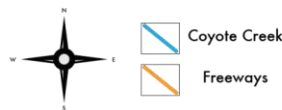
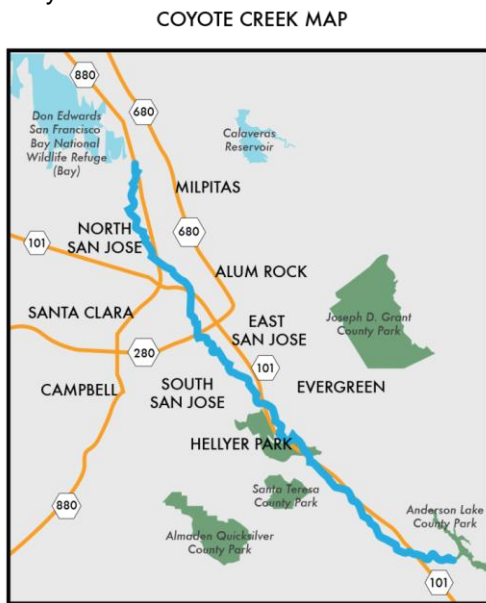
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# Plants & Animals of Coyote Creek

The dense vegetation along this stretch of the Coyote Creek Trail provides habitat for many birds. Even with tanker trucks rumbling through the Kinder Morgan Terminal by the creek, there is plenty of life here.

The plants here are a mix of native species and non-native species introduced from elsewhere. The Santa Clara County Creeks Coalition is working to remove giant reed (*Arundo donax*), an invasive plant, that grows in dense stands along portions of Coyote Creek, crowding out native species and reducing habitat and food supply.

Look and listen for hawks and woodpeckers in the trees. Along the creek banks, you might spot herons and egrets fishing, or red-eared slider turtles basking. This area also has remnants of the historic walnut and fruit orchards that were common throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



## 1. Cliff Swallow\* *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*



Under the bridge where Montague Expressway crosses the creek, you'll see a colony of cliff swallow nests. These nests are made of mud pellets and lined with grasses and feathers. Cliff swallows have metallic blue backs, tan rumps, white forehead patches, and red faces. In the summer, you may see these acrobatic swallows catching insects in midair.

## 2. Holly Oak\* *Quercus ilex*



Introduced from the Mediterranean, holly oaks look very similar to native coast live oaks. The bottom surface of holly oak leaves is covered with silver or tan fuzz, while coast live oaks leaves only have a bit of golden fuzz near the central vein.



Look for rows of small, neatly spaced holes on the trunks of these trees. These holes were made by sapsuckers, a type of woodpecker that feeds on sap.

## 3. Fremont's Cottonwood\* *Populus fremontii*



Cottonwoods are common in riparian areas, and you will see these trees all along this stretch of Coyote Creek. They have heart-shaped leaves and produce drooping clusters of flowers called catkins. Older trees have deeply furrowed bark. In the spring, female trees produce

fluffy white "cotton", which is actually made up of achenes, dried fruit that contain seeds.

## 4. Arroyo Willow\* *Salix lasiolepis*



Water-loving willows grow in and along Coyote Creek. The non-native weeping willow\* (*Salix babylonica*) has long, drooping branches, while the arroyo willow grows more upright. You might see tumor-like growths on the leaves called galls, caused by insects.

## 5. Blue Elderberry\* *Sambucus nigra* subsp. *caerulea*



Common in riparian areas, this tall shrub has compound leaves with 5 to 7 leaflets and serrate margins. It produces clusters of fragrant yellow flowers and dark blue berries. Ripe berries are edible, but can make some people nauseous. California Native Americans used the reddish hollow stems for making flutes and clapper sticks.

## 6. Box Elder\* *Acer negundo*



The box elder is a type of maple that likes to grow near water. Look for a compound leaf, with three leaflets. Male and female flowers are produced by different trees. On the female trees, you might find winged fruits, called samaras, which help disperse the seeds.

## 7. Coyote Brush\* *Baccharis pilularis*



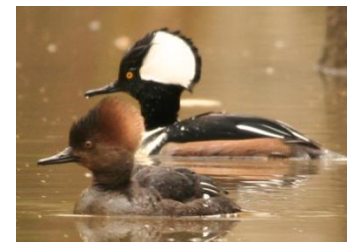
A member of the sunflower family, this shrub has small tough leaves, and produces white fluffy flowers. Coyote brush is dioecious, meaning that male and female flowers grow on different individuals. A pioneer plant, coyote brush grows in many habitats and is often considered a weed even though it is a native plant. It often colonizes disturbed areas and invades grasslands.

## 8. Western Sycamore\* *Platanus racemosa*



As you pass the Kinder Morgan Terminal, look for the lone western sycamore, with a silver trunk, gray flaky bark, and large hand-shaped leaves. Sycamores used to dominate the landscape by Coyote Creek. You can see old stands of these majestic trees by Anderson Dam. Sycamores might look familiar to you, because London plane trees, related hybrids, are commonly used in city landscaping.

## 9. Hooded Merganser\* *Lophodytes cucullatus*



In the winter, hooded mergansers migrate south, and you may see these small diving ducks in the creek. Males have a black and white hood, and females have a cinnamon crest. Mergansers dive for small fish and aquatic insects.