

Ecology of the GUADALUPE RIVER



Belted kingfisher

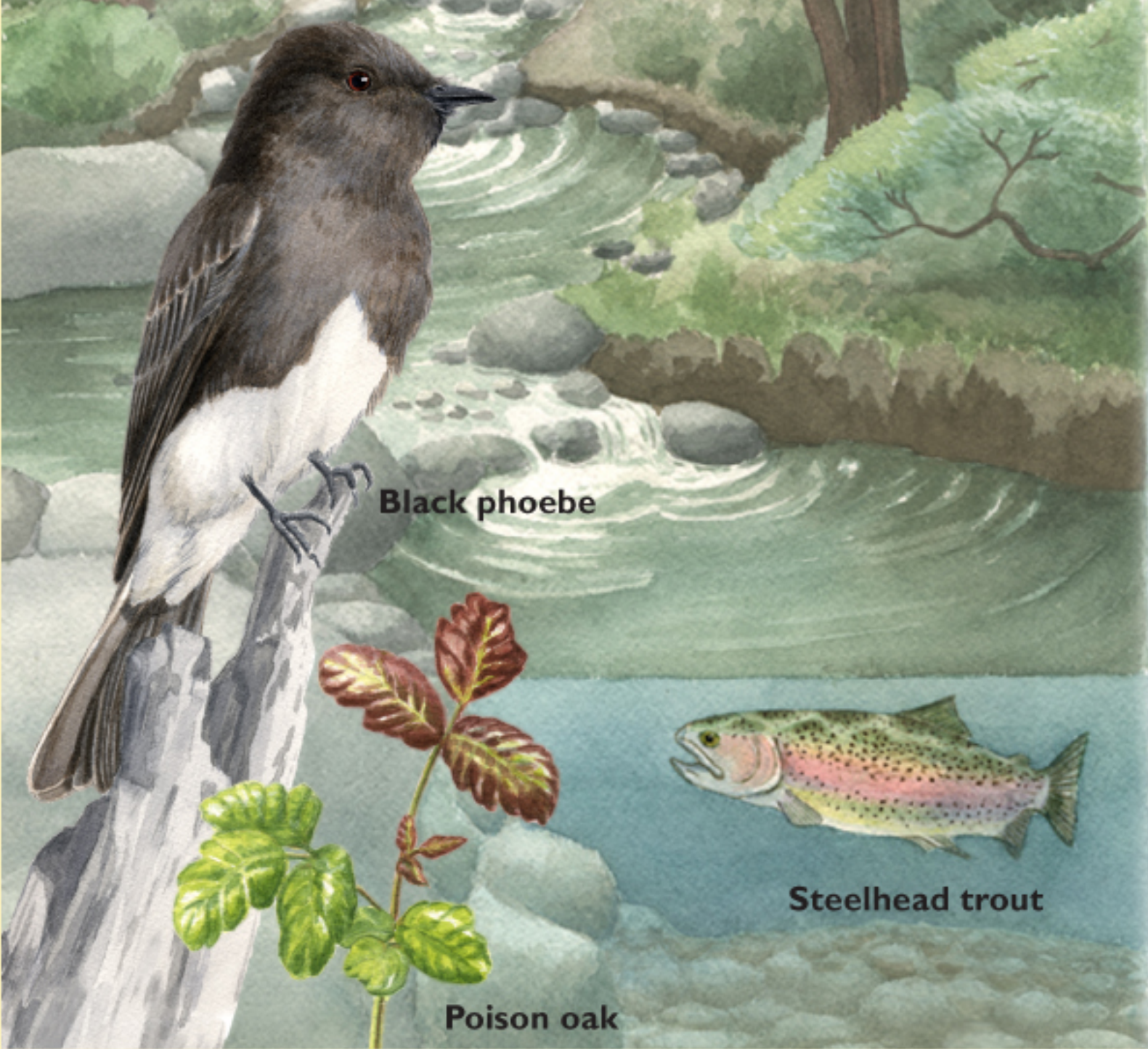
In urbanized areas cottonwood trees grow along the river banks, along with weeping willows and trees introduced from many parts of the world. As the river flows north, the current slows, and the water warms. The riverbed becomes finer grained as the Guadalupe pushes through the flat landscape of San José and ends in the reedy sloughs of Alviso. Native scrub vegetation, such as poison oak and blue elderberry support a burgeoning habitat for bird life -- herons, egrets, cormorants, canvasbacks, mallards and coots.



Black-crowned night heron

From its forested headwaters in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Guadalupe River captures storm water from a 109,000-acre watershed and channels it to the San Francisco Bay. This drainage area is the second largest watershed in Santa Clara County. For hundreds of years the Ohlone/Muwekma people and other tribes sourced much of their water and food from the river. Missionary Juan Crespi—famous for his 1770s explorations of the Monterey region and lands northward—described in his diary what at times was an intermittent stream as "a full-flowing river, having a great many trees in its bed."

Every river changes its character and ecology as it runs downhill. The 20-mile-long Guadalupe is no exception. Upstream of the reservoirs that feed the river, tributaries rush fast, clear and cool in the winter. Steelhead trout, once fished by the Ohlone, still lay eggs in the coarse gravel of the river and its tributaries. A mature riparian forest of red willow, white alder and box elder gives shade to the upper reaches of the Guadalupe.



Black phoebe

Steelhead trout

Poison oak



Great blue heron

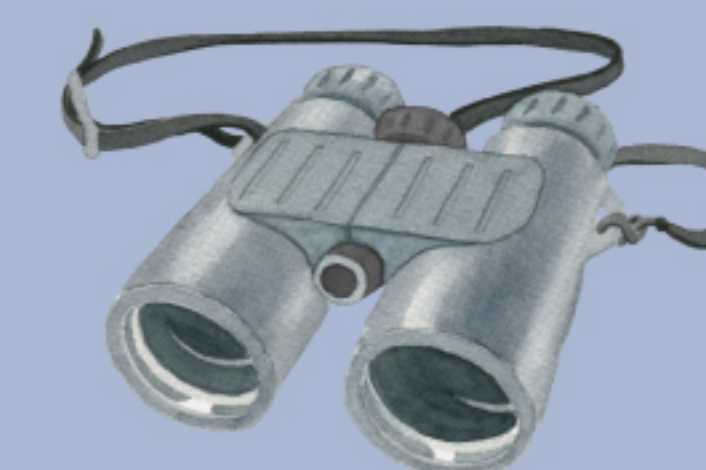
Snowy egret

Wood ducks

Blue elderberry

Bird life along the Guadalupe

- ☞ The **black phoebe** is a flycatcher, often seen flying out from a perch, grabbing an insect in mid-air, and flying back to its perch while giving its "sneep" call.
- ☞ **Belted kingfishers** nest along the Guadalupe River by digging a deep burrow in the soft soil of the bank.
- ☞ The gorgeous **wood duck** is a cavity-nester, using holes in sycamore and cottonwood trees for its nesting duties.
- ☞ The majestic **great blue heron** is a commuter, ranging up and down the river from its nesting and roosting sites in sycamore trees and eucalyptus groves.
- ☞ The **black-crowned night heron** earns its name by coming out at dusk and hunting for small fish, reptiles and crustaceans.
- ☞ The **snowy egret** gave the Audubon Society its start when conservationists gathered to halt the hunting of the bird for its plumes, which were used to decorate hats in the late 1800s.



To learn more about your local birds, take a class or attend a free field trip from the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS.org).

RESTORING THE RIVER

The Guadalupe has been realigned, channeled and tamed to provide protection from devastating city floods. The flood protection project levees provide opportunities for increased public access and continuing efforts to restore the lower river to a more natural state. The protection and replacement of riparian plants help native fish to thrive as they did in the time of Father Crespi.