

Announcements

Youth Scholarship Awards for 2008

The Central Valley Bird Club is pleased to announce youth scholarship awards for 7 kids this summer! This is a huge step for the Club's youth initiative. We did not receive any applications during the past two years and prior to that we only awarded one scholarship annually. By providing many scholarships this year, we hope to create a new generation of young birders in our club as many of the "old guard" youth are now in their mid-20s. All of these recipients wrote excellent essays and were highly recommended by multiple teachers and birders. A common theme was their intense desire to learn as much about birds as possible. Tanner Easterla (age 15) attended VENT's Camp Chiricahua in Arizona; Megan O'Brien (age 13) attended the ABA Snowbird Convention in Utah; Ellen Engilis (age 18) is participating in UC Davis research internship program with a matching grant from UC Davis; and Sylvan Ransom, Liam Huber, Ben Knoot and Thomas Garcia (all 11 year-olds) along with a parent attended the San Francisco State University's Sierra Nevada Field Station's week-long class on the Birds of the Sierra Nevada taught by the incomparable David Shuford. I know that all of these young birders have indelible memories and created new friendships that will last a lifetime in their respective experiences this summer. Let's give them a hearty congratulations! And, please don't hesitate to donate to the Youth Scholarship Fund so that we can send more young birders to camps in 2009! We want to keep the momentum going into next year which will require more donations.

John Sterling

News from the Field

San Joaquin Valley Gull Survey

An intrepid crew of larophiles spent the weekend of 16 and 17 February 2008 searching for and counting gulls in the San Joaquin Valley. Dawn and dusk counts at major gull roosting sites were augmented with searches for rare gull species at foraging sites during daylight hours. Although gull numbers at roosting sites were estimated rather than counted directly, the data provide a late winter snapshot of gull numbers and distribution in the San Joaquin Valley that may be compared with future survey results. Gull populations presumably fluctuate annually and month-to-month during the fall-winter period, but future surveys will be needed to determine the nuances of these population dynamics.

Table 1. Rare gull species reported on the San Joaquin Valley Gull Survey, 16-17 February 2008.

SPECIES	COUNTY					TOTAL
	Kern	Kings	Tulare	Fresno	Merced	
Glaucous Gull	0	0	0	1 ^a	0	1
Glaucous-winged Gull	0	0	0	4 ^b	3	7
Western Gull	0	0	0	0	3	3
Thayer's Gull	0	1	3	30 ^c	8 ^d	42
Mew Gull	1 ^e	1 ^f	0	1 ^e	0	3

^a 2nd cycle, 3rd county record

^b 4th county record; 3 1st cycle, 1 2nd cycle

^c Typical numbers for the Fresno dump

^d Low numbers for O'Neill Forebay

^e adult

^f 1st cycle

Counts at roosting sites resulted in an estimated total of 30,000 gulls, with 15,000 at San Luis Reservoir in Merced County, 10,000 at Millerton Lake on the Fresno and Madera county line, 2,700 at Lake Success in Tulare County, and 2,000 at Buena Vista Lake in Kern County. Of these, California Gulls were estimated to account for 70% to 95% of roosting flocks. Roosting gulls departed in the morning at first light, precluding identification of many of the individual gulls to species. However, the estimated proportion of California Gulls was corroborated by surveys of gull flocks at foraging sites during daylight hours, when species identification was readily attained.

The most numerous gulls in the San Joaquin Valley in winter generally and during our survey, in order of abundance, are California, Ring-billed, Herring, and Bonaparte's. Much less common species found during the survey that were unknown in most counties surveyed until just a dozen or fewer years ago include Mew, Thayer's, Western, Glaucous-winged, and Glaucous gulls. All five of these species were recorded in larger numbers than expected given the few previous records for each (Table 1). In the weeks prior to the survey, Kern County's first Western Gull (1st cycle) and Tulare County's first Glaucous Gull (1st cycle) were found. A few weeks later in March, Tulare County's first Mew Gull was documented. In January, there was an adult Western, at least three Glaucous-winged, and eight Thayer's gulls in Kings County and at least two Glaucous-winged and four Thayer's gulls in Kern County. Species previously documented in the region as vagrant visitors but not detected during this survey include Franklin's Gull, Little Gull, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Sabine's Gull, and Black-legged Kittiwake. Of these, Franklin's Gull is expected only during spring and fall migration and Sabine's Gull only during fall migration.

*John Sterling, Jeff Davis, Todd Easterla, Steve Glover, Tony Kurz,
John Lockhart, Jeff Seay, John Wilson, and Gary Woods*