Central Valley Region Bird Highlights: March 2008 through May 2008

John Sterling, 26 Palm Ave, Woodland, CA 95965 (e-mail: ani@cal.net)

Rare in Tulare County, a migrant **Common Loon** was at Bravo Lake on 27 April (JLk, TK). A **Red-necked Grebe** at the Lincoln Wastewater Treatment Plant 5-6 May (CW, MA) was perhaps the first for Placer County away from Lake Tahoe and one of few spring records for the region. A **Eurasian Wigeon** at the Madera Sewage Ponds on 21-22 May (BB, CH) provided one of few records for Madera County.

A very late **Rough-legged Hawk** lingered in western Placer County from 24-30 April (DWa, EP) establishing one of the latest records for the state.

A **Snowy Plover** at the Madera Sewage Ponds on 28 May (GW) was one of few records for Madera County. Another at Beale Air Force Base on 30 April (JLa) was the first for Yuba County. Most records of this species come from the large evaporation ponds in the Tulare Lake Basin where they breed. A **Solitary Sandpiper** on 2 April (DJ) at Sailor Bar along the American River, Sacramento County, was early for this spring migrant. Another was at a farm pond on White Rock Road in western Mariposa County on 18 April (JCS) for one of few county records. One at Dead Pig Pond on 27 April (JLk, TK) was a good find during a big day in Tulare County. Also noteworthy was Tuolumne County's first **Lesser Yellowlegs** at the large pond on LaGrange Road on 15-18 April (JLx, JCS).

Marbled Godwits are locally rare in most Central Valley locations away from the Tulare Lake Basin. Third county records were established with two along Marcuse Road south of Yuba City on 14 May (JLa) in Sutter County, and another at the Madera Sewage Ponds on 23-30 May (PF, GW, CH) in Madera County. One **Sanderling** at the Madera Sewage Ponds on 20 May (GW) provided the second record for Madera County, and was joined by twelve more the following day (GW), with seven remaining on 22 May (CH), five on 23 May (PF), and three on 25 May (GW). This may have been the largest flock of this coastal species ever reported for the Central Valley, especially north of the Tulare Lake Basin. Sutter County's first **Red Knot** was in a flooded rice field off Marcuse Rd south of Yuba City on 14 May (JLa). Another was at the Gustine Sewage Ponds on 20 May (PJM) for one a few Merced County records. Also in Merced County, a **Stilt Sandpiper** was found at the Merced NWR on 16 April (PJM). At least one had wintered there for the past four years, and it is likely that the April sighting involved one of the same birds. A **Ruff** at the Fresno Sewage Ponds on 25 May (PS) was a very late date for this rare, but regularly-wintering Eurasian shorebird. Two **Ruffs** wintering at the Vic Fazio Wildlife Area in Yolo County remained there until 21 March (SH+).

An adult **Franklin's Gull** visited the Ceres Sewage Ponds on 26 April (HR) for one of few records for Stanislaus County; another stopped by the Davis Wetlands on 5 April (EH). An adult **Mew Gull** at the Ione Sewage Ponds on 2-25 March (LW, JR, KP) was only the third Amador County record. Even more exciting was the adult **Mew Gull** near Alpaugh 15-19 Mar (JLk, TK) for the overdue first record for Tulare County. Lingering **Mew Gulls** from winter included one at the Fresno Sewage Ponds on 19 Mar (BB, LH+) and another at Kutras Lake in Shasta County on 14 Mar (RF). In Butte County, a **Thayer's Gull** west of Nelson on 4 Mar (BW) and two **Glaucous-winged Gulls** at Thermalito Afterbay on 14 Mar (RF) were probably on the move after wintering in the region. Other wintering gulls were seen on 4 March: an adult **Western Gull** and single adult and first-cycle **Glaucous Gulls** at the Davis Landfill (GE); a first-cycle **Glaucous-winged Gull** at the Kern NWR (JSL, FO); and a first-cycle **Western Gull** on Corcoran Reservoir (JSL, FO) that was about the third record for Kings County. In Kings County, a first-cycle **Glaucous Gull** and two **Thayer's Gulls** were still present on 16 March (RH).

Migrating **Black Swifts** are always difficult to find in the region due to their unpredictability, so one at Del Puerto Canyon on 26 May (HR) was unexpected and a first record for Stanislaus County. Another was at Lagoon Valley on 24 May (RM) for one of few records for Solano County. Two **Costa's Hummingbirds** were coming to feeders in Red Bluff with one on 9-18 April (RW) and another on 19-22 April (MS, BD) for the first records for Tehama County. A winter **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** in Sanger, Fresno County, remained until 6 March (BB).

Gray Flycatchers have been documented in recent decades as regular spring migrants on the valley floor and foothills, but this spring larger numbers than normal were found at a few locations. One on 3 April (JCS) at the San Joaquin Experimental Range Station in the lower foothills of Madera County was the earliest record for the region. Surveys there during the rest of the month documented a small migration with up to seven individuals per day until 25 April when an astonishing 62 were found (JT, JCS, DD). This is probably the largest concentration ever recorded for this species, anywhere. Though a bit above the usual elevation range for reports in this column, five **Gray Flycatchers** found together on Driver's Flat Road between Auburn and Foresthill on 29 April (DR) was an unprecedented number for the western slope in Placer County.

A pair of **Purple Martins,** presumably the same birds discovered last year nesting under the Highway 65 overpass over Taylor Road near Roseville, returned on 25 May (RP) for Placer County's second record since 1906. A **Sage Thrasher** along Thornton Road north of the Lodi Sewage Ponds on 14 May (DWi) was a good find and fits into the known pattern of late spring records in the region. However, one along White Rock Rd and straddling the Merced/Mariposa County line on 23 March (JSL) was at a location where the species is annually reported in late March and early

April. A male **Black-and-white Warbler** along Putah Creek west of Davis in Solano and Yolo counties on 24 May (IE) may have been the same bird seen upstream on 17 April (AE). The warbler highlight of the spring was the singing male **Hooded Warbler** along the American River Parkway at the Gristmill Access on 16 May (JML+) for a great Sacramento County record. Two **Summer Tanagers** returned this spring with the singing male near Auburn from 6 May (LR) for its third summer, and a male in El Dorado Hills on 15-25 March (KM, GE+) where it was previously seen in March 2007. Both were first county records when initially discovered. An immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** visited a feeder for a week in early March (*fide* MR) near Fresno and undoubtedly wintered in the area. A male **Indigo Bunting** near Lake Success on 4 May (TK) was a bit early for a spring vagrant and was one of few records for Tulare County. Sacramento County hosted two **Green-tailed Towhees** including the wintering bird in Rancho Cordova until 9 May (ToE) and a migrant in Carmichael on 18 April (EH). A male **Lark Bunting** in eastern Stanislaus County on 24-28 April (CC, JCS) was near locations where this species has been found in previous springs.

Like the Gray Flycatcher, **Brewer's Sparrows** are regular spring migrants on the valley floor and foothills in small numbers. Several were reported including one on Deer Creek Road in Tulare County on 13 April (SAL), up to seven per survey day through April at the San Joaquin Experimental Range Station (JT, JCS, DD), one on Michigan Bar Road in eastern Sacramento County on 26 April (GE), and two along White Rock Road in western Mariposa County on 28 April (JCS). A migrant **Harris Sparrow** along the Mokelumne River in Lodi on 29 April (AP) was a surprising spring record and one of few for San Joaquin County. Completely unexpected were the flocks of **Cassin's Finches**, including singing males, in foothills bordering the valley floor in Madera and Fresno counties. About twenty were at the San Joaquin Experimental Range Station until at least 25 April (JT, JCS, DD), a small flock was on Black Mountain in Fresno County on 10 May (JT) and several were coming to feeders in Oakhurst, Madera County, throughout the spring period (JND+). Surprisingly, an **Evening Grosbeak** was present in Del Puerto Canyon on 21-26 May (JB, MD, HR) for first Stanislaus County record, and a very unusual May record for the region of this montane species that primarily, yet rarely, occurs in lowlands during the winter.

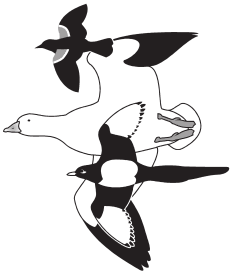
Thanks to Bruce Deuel, Ed Pandolfino, and Steve Hampton for supplying summaries of bird sightings. Other observers include: Mark Aring, Bev Brock, Juliette Bryson, Chris Conard, Jeff Davis (JND), Matthew Dodder, Doug Drynan, Todd Easterla (ToE), Andy Engilis, Irene Engilis, Gil Ewing, Peter Fahey, Rob Fowler, Rob Hansen, Ed Harper, Lynn Hemink, Chris Hiatt, Dave Johnson, Tony Kurz, Jeri Langham (JML), Jim Laughlin (JLa), Steve Laymon (SAL), John Lockhart (JLk), Jim Lomax (JLx), John Luther (JSL), Karla Meadows, Peter Metropulos (PJM), Roger Muscat, Frances Oliver, Kathy Parker, Andy Pfeffer, Ron Pozzi, Harold Reeve, Larry Risser, Deren

Ross, Jim Rowoth, Michael Ruffino, John Sterling (JCS), Penny Stewart, Michele Swartout, Jim Tietz, Charley Walker, Dee Warenycia (DWa), Liz West, Brian Williams, Dan Williams (DWi), Robin Wolcott, and Gary Woods.

[Editor's Note – Alert readers may note a subtle change in the title of this column, made to reflect that fact that bird sightings for foothill locations bordering the Central Valley are often included. — TM]

Announcements

Central Valley Birding Symposium
20-23 November 2008



Dear CVBC Member:

The 12th annual CVBS will be held in Stockton Nov 20th-23rd. Keynote speakers include Hans Peeters and John Muir Laws. Both are accomplished illustrators and writers, and both recently have had field guides published. Birding experts Jon Dunn and Joe Morlan will again be on hand to help make sense of complicated bird identification problems, and Andy Engilis from the University of California in Davis promises a new look to his always popular bird specimens workshop. The full day field trips featured on Friday are always led by some of the best birders in the region. We will return to the Stockton Grand Hotel, which was completely remodeled this year, making it more "birder friendly" than ever before. As always, one of the biggest goals of both the CVBC and CVBS has been to foster a birding community within the Central Valley and help promote the study of distribution, status, ecology and conservation of birds within the region. Your participation in this annual event directly helps us meet these goals, and gives all of us a chance to do what we're best at – enjoying birds and fun amongst good friends.

See you soon,

David Yee
CVBS Chair