

Notes

Nesting Yellow-billed Magpies in Fresno County – On 9 April 2002 I discovered a nest of Yellow-billed Magpies (*Pica nuttalli*) near the town of Tranquillity, Fresno County. The nest was located in a small eucalyptus grove comprised of 15 Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*) of varying ages and a lone Valley Oak (*Quercus lobata*). Agricultural fields and an irrigation canal, which borders the eastern side of the grove, dominate the surrounding landscape. The nest was a typical domed, stick structure approximately 20 meters from the ground in a large, dead eucalyptus tree. I visited the site on a number of occasions until 16 May. Three adult Yellow-billed Magpies were frequently observed at the grove during this 5-week period. No nesting activity was observed after 22 April and the nest was eventually abandoned. Due to the extreme height of the nest, I could not ascertain clutch size nor determine the reason for nest abandonment. I had seen magpies at this site in 2001, but did not observe nesting activity then.

The Yellow-billed Magpie is endemic to California, ranging west of the Sierra Nevada on the floor and in the adjacent foothills of the Central Valley and in coastal valleys from San Francisco to and including Santa Barbara County (Grinnell and Miller, *Pac. Coast Avifauna* 27, 1944). Although high densities of this species still exist in the Sacramento Valley (Reynolds, Yellow-billed Magpie (*Pica nuttalli*), *The Birds of North America*, No. 180, 1995), it has virtually been extirpated in the San Joaquin Valley south of Madera County, and there have been no recent reports of breeding on the valley floor from Fresno County southward (Rob Hansen pers. comm.). An examination of 26 Breeding Bird Survey routes in Fresno, Tulare, and Kern counties revealed only one route that consistently documented the presence of Yellow-billed Magpies over a 35-year period (no data were available for Kings County). The Coalinga BBS route in Fresno and San Benito counties has documented an apparently stable population of Yellow-billed Magpies for 24 of the total 35 years of the survey (Sauer et al., *The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966 - 2000*. Version 2001.2, 2001). Tranquillity is on the floor of the San Joaquin Valley about 58 miles north of Coalinga.

Land alterations, primarily agricultural conversion, have undoubtedly affected historical Yellow-billed Magpie populations in the southern San Joaquin Valley. Yellow-billed Magpies prefer to occupy habitat where large trees are scattered among broad expanses of open ground (Reynolds loc. cit.). The destruction of many of the Valley Oaks originally found in the San Joaquin Valley probably lessened the habitat suitability of the region for this species. — Kimberly Kreitinger, *California State University Stanislaus, Endangered Species Recovery Program, 1900 N. Gateway #101, Fresno, CA 93727*.