

First record of White-winged Junco (*Junco hyemalis aikenii*) for the Central Valley, California

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The White-winged Junco (*Junco hyemalis aikenii*) has one of the most restricted ranges of all forms of Dark-eyed Junco in North America, breeding from southeastern Montana and western South Dakota south to northeastern Wyoming and northwestern Nebraska. Its wintering range includes its breeding range and south to southwestern Colorado, north central New Mexico and casually to Arizona, western Kansas and Oklahoma (AOU 1957). Extralimital reports are rare (AOU 1998). Patten et al. (1998) summarized California's first two records, a single bird in San Rafael, Marin County, and one in Desert Center, Riverside County. The bird we report herein is the third published record for the state and first for the Central Valley.

On 18 November 2000 a White-winged Junco appeared among a mixed junco flock in Biddlecomb's yard in Fair Oaks, Sacramento County. The bird remained in the yard through 23 March 2001. The flock was amazingly diverse, containing at least three Slate-colored Juncos (either *J. h. hyemalis* or *J. h. cismontanus*), a possible Pink-sided Junco (*J. h. mearnsi*), and 15 – 30 Oregon Juncos (possibly *J. h. thurber* and *J. h. shufeldti*). The winter of 2000–2001 was extraordinary for wandering White-winged Juncos in the western United States, with at least seven reports (including the Fair Oaks bird) outside the normal range. Extralimital White-winged Juncos were reported in New Mexico at Albuquerque and Capulin National Monument (New Mexico Rare Bird Alert transcripts) and in Arizona at Flagstaff, Elden Mountain, and Tucson (Arizona Rare Bird Alert transcripts). In Bishop, Inyo County, California, a White-winged Junco was reported coming to a feeder on 22 December 2000 and was seen at least through the end of January 2001 (San Bernardino Valley Rare Bird Alert transcripts, E. Greaves pers. comm.).

The Fair Oaks bird exhibited several characteristics that immediately distinguished it from the other juncos present. The following description is based mostly on notes compiled by both authors, with contributions from John Trochet. The White-winged Junco was unique in shape. It was noticeably larger than the other juncos, similar in size (body and tail length) to the numerous White-crowned Sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) that commonly mixed with the junco flock. Its longer tail imparted a more

elongated jizz, very different from other juncos. One of the most distinctive features was the extensive amount of white on the tail that laterally involved all but the central two tail feathers. As a result, the white actually framed the end of the tail (Figure 1). The bird had an overall light pale-gray (almost with a bluish tint) head, back and breast with a white belly in a pattern similar to Slate-colored Junco. The tertials and hindmost scapulars exhibited white edges imparting a distinctive frosted appearance (Figure 1). The bird also had black lores that extended to encompass the eyes. The bill was pink and relatively larger than those of the Oregon Juncos present. From November through late December, the two white wing bars on the median and greater wing coverts, for which this form is noted, were quite visible. These faded and were less distinct, forming thin edges, from January through mid-February. By March, the wing bars were nearly absent.

As a general rule, the White-winged Junco came in with several to many other juncos to feed on the ground and at an elevated feeder in Biddlecomb's yard. The juncos generally came in small groups, fed and left. The White-winged Junco associated with a flock that had the possible Pink-sided and at least one Slate-colored Junco. Biddlecomb timed the White-winged Junco's feeding bouts on 19 January 2001. He started observations at 1500. The bird fed for approximately 5 minutes and departed. The bird returned



Figure 1. White-winged Junco (*Junco hyemalis aikeni*) in Fair Oaks, Sacramento County, California, mid-January 2001. Overall shape and pattern of bird, including the white framing the tail, are clearly visible. Note dark lores, white wing bars, and frosted tertials and hindmost scapulars.

Photo by Mark Biddlecomb

at 1550 and fed for about 10 minutes and departed. It returned again at 1625 and fed again for 10 to 15 minutes. It did not return after that last bout. This pattern of visitations occurred throughout each day. The bird also preferred the feeder mounted on a 5-foot pole (Fig. 1). The other juncos were rarely, if ever, observed visiting this feeder. The White-winged Junco also perched on the 6-foot fence and in nearby trees (as the flock arrived to feed) much more often than the other juncos. It seemed to prefer being higher above ground than the other juncos.

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