

## Central Valley Bird Highlights: August through November 2012

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An adult and immature **Trumpeter Swan** were photographed in Upper Butte Basin WA on 26 Oct (*fide* BED). A **Red-breasted Merganser** was on O'Neill Forebay in Merced County on 28 Nov (KVV) where this species is fairly regular, as is **Pacific Loon** found there the same day. A Pacific Loon was also on Folsom Lake along with a **Red-throated Loon** on 31 Oct (RPz) and was joined by a female **White-winged Scoter** on 13 Nov (JCS). All three birds were in Placer County with the **Red-throated Loon** ranging into El Dorado and Sacramento County sections of the lake. A **Pacific Loon** was on Kutras Lake in Redding, Shasta County on 10 Nov (RBr) where this species has been found annually in recent years. Also rare away from the coast, an immature **Surf Scoter** was at the Woodland WTP in Yolo County from 30 Oct (CGa) through Nov, and another was on O'Neill Forebay on 23 Oct through end of Nov (KVV). **Least Bittern** is a highly local species in the valley and is rare in most of the region, so one at Mather Lake on 21 Aug (GEw) was noteworthy for Sacramento County. A **Red-necked Grebe** was at Rancho Seco in southern Sacramento County on 16 Oct (EP, WEH, BED).

Once again, **Brown Pelicans** made a splash in the Central Valley with two near Sherman Island in Sacramento/San Joaquin counties on 11 August (CCo), one along 6<sup>th</sup> Ave in southern Kings County on 12 Aug (JLD), two at Rio Vista, Sacramento/Solano counties the same day (GEw), nine at O'Neill Forebay, Merced County on 17 Aug (KVV), two at the Davis Wetlands on 23 Aug (SCH), one at the Yolo Bypass WA on 31 Aug (SCH), eight at O'Neill Forebay on 8 Sept (KVV), and in Glenn County, one was at the Sacramento NWR on 16-17 Sept (DS) for a first county record, followed by the second county record that also established Tehama County's first record when one was seen flying around both ends of Black Butte Reservoir on 7-16 Oct (BED). A late Brown Pelican was on Riverlake in the Pocket Area of Sacramento County on 22 Nov (FC).

Of the two golden-plover species in the region, **American Golden-Plover** is the rarest of the two. A juvenile at Hanford WTP on 5 Oct (MSy) was the second record for Kings County. In western Mariposa County, along White Rock Rd, a **Semipalmated Plover** graced a farm pond on 5 Aug (JSL). Always rare in the Sacramento Valley, one or two **Snowy Plovers** visited a newly formed drainage pond on Husted Rd and Hwy 20 just east of Williams in Colusa County on 22-30 August (FO, PC). Single **Willetts** at the District 10 rice

fields in Yuba County on 3 Oct (JSL) and along the north shore of Black Butte Reservoir in Tehama County on 16 Oct (KPa) were noteworthy as this species is generally rare north of Yolo County. An extremely late **Marbled Godwit** was at the Yolo Bypass WA on 18-26 Nov (ELoP, SCH). As usual, a few **Solitary Sandpipers** were reported with one at the Chowchilla WTP, Madera County on 19 Aug (DSu), one at Yolo Bypass WA on 17 Sept (DT).

**Red Knots** are always a treat to find in the Central Valley with one at Fresno WTP on 16 Sept (PSt), but four with a rare **Sanderling** at the Yolo Bypass WA on 26 Aug (ToEa) was an extraordinary number. Another **Sanderling** was at the Granite Bay Boat Launch on Folsom Lake, Placer County on 11 Sept (RPz). An adult male **Ruff** with vestiges of breeding plumage was at the Woodland WTP on 1-2 Aug. (ToEa). Another adult was at the Yolo Bypass WA on 26-27 Aug (JSL, LP). This species is found annually in Yolo County. Further south, a **Ruff** was at the Tulare WTP on 12 Aug (JLD) and the Nevada Ave ponds in Kings County where it was joined by a **Stilt Sandpiper** on 3 and 15 Sept (MSy). **Baird's Sandpipers** are scarce but regular fall migrants through the region with typical numbers reported during this period. Two were at the Gustine WTP, Merced County on 17 Aug (KVV), one at Colusa NWR, Colusa County on 19 Aug (RLeV), one at Chowchilla WTP, Madera County on 21-31 Aug (DSu, CDL), one at Lincoln WTP in Placer County on 31 Aug (SD), one at Ceres WTP in Stanislaus County on 7 Sept (JHG), two at Lincoln WTP on 5 Oct (SD), and lastly, one at Woodland WTP was on the extremely late date of 5 Nov (JCS).

A **Long-tailed Jaeger** harassed terns on O'Neill Forebay, Merced County on 15 Sept (ToEa). An unidentified **Pomarine** or **Parasitic Jaeger** was there on 7 Sept along with an immature **Laughing Gull**, one of few records for the Central Valley (KVV). A juvenile **Franklin's Gull** at the Modesto WTP in Stanislaus County on 24 Sept (RB) was on a typical date, but one on 28 Oct (CGa) to 15 Nov (JML) at the Yolo Bypass WA was getting late as was one on Kutras Lake, Redding in Shasta County on 26 Nov (RBr). Corcoran Reservoir in Kings County hosted a **Franklin's** and a **Mew gull** on 27 Oct (MSy). A normally pelagic **Sabine's Gull** was at Woodland WTP in Yolo County on 12-16 Oct (CGa). A first cycle **Lesser Black-backed Gull** photographed in Kings County on 11 Nov (MSy) was the only report this period of this increasingly detected species. A **Thayer's Gull** at the Lone WTP on 5 Nov (JSL) was a first record for that location and one of only a few for Amador County. Although **Least Tern** has nested regularly in Kings County, an adult at the Hanford WTP on 5-19 Aug. (MSy) was a first record for that location. Three **Common Terns** at O'Neill Forebay on 20 Sept (JCS) and a single bird on 7 Sept (KVV) were not unexpected but three at Bogg's Slough in Kings County on 5 Sept (MSy) provided one of few county records.

A flock of 28 **Band-tailed Pigeons** in Davis on 4 Nov (SCH) was a large number for this species that rarely occurs on the valley floor. **Long-eared Owl**

is a rare and difficult species to find in the Central Valley, two in Sacramento County with one at Mather Lake on 5-18 Aug (CCo) and one at Cosumnes Preserve on 26 Nov (CCo) were a surprise. Most valley records are from late fall and winter. **Northern Saw-whet Owls** probably winter in the valley more than we realize, but because they are so difficult to find roosting in dense vegetation, any individuals that are found attract more than a few birders. One in a cemetery in Stockton on 12 Nov (JRo) delighted quite a few birders enjoying this San Joaquin County rarity. The grassland along Carbondale Rd in western Amador County was the scene of a discovery of a **Burrowing Owl** on 5 Nov (JSL) for only the third or so county record. A few **Calliope Hummingbirds** found their way to the valley floor with singles in downtown Sacramento on 22 Aug (EP) and Colusa NWR on 26 Aug (FO, JRo, LW). As usual, a few rare sapsuckers were found. Single **Red-naped Sapsuckers** were in Lodi from 13 October (JK), along Clear Creek Rd in Redding, Shasta County on 27 Oct (BY), near Lake Success in Tulare County on 31 Oct (TKz), and near Oakdale on 18 Nov (JH). A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was along Putah Creek in Yolo County on 13 Oct (MP), and Tehama County's first record was in Red Bluff on 14-16 Oct (BED).

The best land bird of the season was the Central Valley's first **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** found at the Grasslands Park off Mace Ave in southern Yolo County on 1-2 Sept (ToEa). This bird was well photographed and the record was accepted by the CBRC. A rare **Least Flycatcher** joined it on the latter date (ToEa). Another *Empidonax* was photographed at Boggs Slough in Kings County on 18 Nov (TKz) and appeared to be a **Willow Flycatcher**—which is an outstanding record for this late date. An adult female **Vermilion Flycatcher** was at the Kern Water Bank near Buttonwillow in Kern County on 13 Oct (JCS). Two **Tropical Kingbirds** near the Hanford WTP from 17 Nov to the end of the period (MSy) were the first records for Kings County of this usually coastal vagrant from the south. A few **Northern Shrikes** made it south to the region with one in western Placer County from 2 Nov through the end of the month (SD), one at the Fremont Weir in Yolo County on 3 Nov (BC), and one in Red Bluff in Tehama County on 4 Nov (BED).

**Chestnut-backed Chickadees** are rare and local in the region, and one at Corral Hollow was present at the species' only known location in San Joaquin County on 27 Oct through Nov (DY). A **Winter Wren** along Lake Solano on Putah Creek was discovered on 20 Nov (JLD, WEH, DT) and remained to overwinter. This was the first Yolo County record and only the second to be found in the general region (and only about ½ mile outside of the Central Valley boundary). A **Gray Catbird** provided the first county record in Sutter County at Bobelaine Audubon Preserve on 19-20 Oct (JCS). For the second time, a **Brown Thrasher** was caught and banded at Stone Lakes NWR, Sacramento County on 3 Oct (MSc)—the first was there on 10 July 2008. Normally a denizen of the Great Basin in summer and the southern deserts in winter,

**Sage Thrashers** are regular, but generally scarce migrants through the valley. One at the Cosumnes River Preserve in Sacramento County on 18 Oct (JTr) was the only report. A **Chestnut-collared Longspur** at the Woodbridge Ecological Preserve in San Joaquin County on 7 Nov (DC) was the only longspur reported.

Three **Tennessee Warblers** were found with one in Carmichael, Sacramento County on 9 Sept (ClH), another at Putah Creek and Pedrick Rd, Yolo/Solano counties on 16-17 Sept (MSr, CGa), and the third at Babel Slough, Yolo County on 23 Sept (ToEa). **Northern Parula** is one of the most reported eastern vagrants in the Central Valley with records throughout the seasons. One was at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 11 Aug (JTr) another was nearby at the Sacramento Bufferlands on 6 Sept (CCo), and one provided the first Stanislaus County record at Orange Blossom Recreation Area on 16 Sept (DR). The only **American Redstart** reported was one in a backyard in McKinley Park area in Sacramento on 11 Oct (RM).

The best warbler of the fall was Yolo County's first **Bay-breasted Warbler** at Babel Slough on 19 Sept (ToEa). This is the third Central Valley record, following two records from the American River Parkway in Sacramento County in recent years. Almost as good was the **Cape May Warbler** at San Luis Creek area off O'Neill Forebay on 27 Sept (ADeM) for a first Merced County record. Although a fairly common vagrant on the coast, **Palm Warbler** is much more rare in the valley, and one at Chico State University Farm on 28 Sept (JBS) was only the fifth Butte County record. Another in Rocklin on 28 Oct (SCR) was the second Placer County record. Single **Blackpoll Warblers** were along Putah Creek on 11 Sept (MK) in Yolo/Solano counties, Lagoon Valley, Solano County on 14 Sept (PH), Babel Slough, Yolo County on 14 Sept (ToEa), Lake Solano on Putah Creek on 16 Sept (MP), La Loma Park in Stanislaus County on 16 Sept (JHG, SSa), and Sacramento City Cemetery on 25 Sept (GEw).

**Summer Tanager** records have been increasing over the past decade, so one along Putah Creek in Solano/Yolo counties on 11-25 Aug (MK) and another in north Davis on 15 Aug (SCH) were not surprising. A male **Indigo Bunting** was found on 4 August at the Sacramento Bypass, Yolo County (KvG). It entertained many birders through 19 August and there was some speculation that it nested at that site. A female **Indigo Bunting** was on Putah Creek and Pedrick Rd on 11 Sept in Yolo/Solano counties (JCS). An **Orchard Oriole** at the same location 11-15 Sept (ToEa) established the first record for both counties. An adult male **Hooded Oriole** at Putah Creek and Pedrick Rd on 21 Oct (MSr) was on a very late date for this species.

The montane **Green-tailed Towhee** rarely migrates in lowlands, so one in Davis in Yolo County on 23 Sept (CD) was noteworthy. After last winter's bonanza of **Lark Buntings** in the region, only one was found this fall with a

female on Devil's Den Rd in sw Kings County on 26 Oct (JCS) and 10 Nov (MSy). **Brewer's Sparrows** are scarce migrants in the valley, but one at Yolo Bypass WA on 23 Sept (JCS) was at a location where they are found annually in fall. Four more were at the Kern Water Bank on 13 Oct (JCS), with another at Bogg's Slough on 4 Nov (MSy) where they are probably regular, uncommon migrants. **Clay-colored Sparrows** were found in Fairfield in Solano County on 22 Oct (DSw) and the Kern Water Bank on 10-25 Oct (JCS). A well photographed "Sage" Sparrow in grasslands along Waverly Rd in eastern San Joaquin County showed characters of the migratory **Sagebrush Sparrow** (WEH) rather than of the southern San Joaquin *canescens* subspecies of the newly split **Bell's Sparrow**.

**Grasshopper Sparrows** are rarely found during migration, and one on Jellys Ferry Rd in Tehama County in early Sept (MPI *vide* BED) provided one of few county records, and two juveniles at the Sacramento NWR on 5 Oct (JCS) were the second Glenn County record. Another was at Stone Lakes NWR on 5 Oct (CG) in Sacramento County. **Swamp Sparrows** are sporadic in winter in the region, and this year only two were detected which is about average. One was at the Jersey Ave ponds in Kings County from 25 Nov through winter (MSy) and the other was at Merced NWR on 17 Nov (KVV). Last year's wintering **Harris's Sparrow** in Davis returned on 26 Oct (CD) for another winter. A **Harris's Sparrow** found near Oakdale on 22 Nov (JH), stayed for only a few days.

Highly unusual in early fall were a single **Red Crossbill** in Roeding Park in urban Fresno on 24 Aug (EE) whose call was recorded and matched to Type 1, a small flock of 20 on Putah Creek and Pedrick Rd in Yolo/Solano counties on 2-11 Sept (SCH, JCS), three at Mace Ranch, Yolo County on 11 Sept (MP), and a single in Floyd Rice Park, Avenal on 27 Sept (ADeM) for a first Kings County record. A male **Cassin's Finch** was carefully observed at the UC Davis Arboretum on 7 Nov (CGa) for the eighth Yolo County record. After last year's influx of **Evening Grosbeaks** into parts of the region, reports this year included several over Sacramento on 28 Oct (CCo), about ten over Esparto in Yolo County on 28 Oct (WR), three over Davis on 18 Nov (MP), one over Davis on 27 Nov (SCH), and one at the East Lawn Cemetery in Sacramento on 23 Nov (JTr).

The observers are: Ralph Baker, Ray Bruun (RBr), Brent Campos, Peter Colasanti, Darryl Coldren, Chris Conard (CCo), Farley Cross, Al DeMartini, Bruce Deuel (BED), Scott Dietrich, Chris Dunford, Jon Dunn (JLD), Todd Easterla (ToEa), Elias Elias, Gil Ewing (GEw), Jim Gain (JHG), Claire Gallagher (CGa), Cory Gregory, Kevin Guse (KvG), Steve Hampton (SCH), Ed Harper (WEH), John Harris, Cliff Hawley (CIH), Pat Hildreth, Joanne Katanic, Tony Kurz (TKz), Manfred Kusch, Jeri Langham (JML), Ron LeValley, Eric LoPresti (ELoP), Calvin Lou (CDL), John Luther (JSL), Don Marsh, Ron Melcer, Frances Oliver, Ed Pandolfino, Michael Park, Kathy Parker (KPa), Michael Perrone, Linda Pittman,

Mike Plank (MPI), Ron Pozzi (RPz), Darren Rees, William Rockey, Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Jim Rowoth (JRo), Sal Salerno (SSa), Mary Schiedt (MSc), Dan Skalos, Jim Snowden (JBS), Mark Stacey (MSy), John Sterling (JCS), Penny Stewart (PSt), Mike Strom (MSr), Dave Suddjian (DSu), Danny Swicegood (DSw), Dan Tankersley, John Trochet (JTr), Kent Van Vuren, Liz West, David Yee, and Bob Yutzy.

Abbreviations used: WA=State Wildlife Area, WTP=Wastewater Treatment Plant; CBRC=California Bird Records Committee; NWR=National Wildlife Refuge.



Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*). 09 May 2012 on Meiss Rd., Sacramento County, California. Photo © Linda Pittman