

## Central Valley Bird Highlights: December 2012 through February 2013

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**Brant** are very rare inland, so one photographed at Colusa NWR on 19 and 25 January (fide JLG, MPT) was an exciting find, but disappointed birders could not relocate it on subsequent days. However, one was found with an Aleutian Cackling Geese on Staten Island, Sacramento County, on 18 January (fide DS) and resighted the following day (KPa). **Tundra Swans**, rare south of Merced County, were in Kings County with three on Newton Ave 29 December (MSy). **Trumpeter Swans**, rare anywhere in the state, were in southern Sutter County (JLg+) with one-two on 13-17 January and one on Road Z in Glenn County on 2 January (JSn). White geese appeared south of their usual haunts, with three **Snow Geese** on Utica Road and three **Ross's Geese** at 10<sup>th</sup> and Pueblo Ave on 29 December (TKz) both in Kings County.

Last year's best bird of the winter season, a male **Falcated Duck** from Siberia, returned to the Colusa NWR (MPT) on 2 December, but disappeared after 19 December. **Eurasian Wigeon** is a regular winter visitor to the region with dozens sometimes documented in Gray Lodge and other areas of waterfowl concentration. However, five at the Lone WTP in Amador County on 17 February (FSt) was a high count for the foothills until seven were found there on the following day (DMr, TEa). Another Siberian duck, **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** was found at Colusa NWR on 14 January (SB), the Yolo Bypass W.A. on 27 February (KK+), Bravo Lake in Tulare County on 24 December (TKz), one-two at the Llano Seco Unit of Sacramento River NWR on 29 January –5 February (CPD, JBg+), and along Creed Road in Solano County on 12 January (DS, SM). An adult male **Surf Scoter** was in the Delta off Sherman Island on 1 December (CG), and two were present on 29 January (EP) where this species may prove to occur annually. A female at East Park Res. on 11 December (KP) was a first for Colusa County. Another coastal species that is very rare inland, a **Long-tailed Duck** was in Benicia on 3 January (EP), where the species has occurred on a few occasions. Another at the Yolo Bypass W.A. on 13-15 December (JMck, DSm) was only the fourth or so Yolo County record.

**Red-breasted Mergansers** are rare but regular in migration and winter primarily in large flocks of **Common Mergansers**. This winter many more were reported than usual with an adult male on Lake Success on 27 December (KPa) and one in Fresno on 27 January (JND), a female was on the north side

of Comanche Res. in Amador County on 8 February (JCS) followed by three there on 16-17 February (KPa), a female was at Salt Springs Valley Res. in Calaveras County on 8 February (JSL), a first county record female at Marcum Road in Sutter County on 8-20 January (CH, FrO+), three females at Bravo Lake in Tulare County on 24 December (TKz), a female at Laguna West in Sacramento on 24 December (CG), two females at Greenhaven Lake in Sacramento on 30 December–1 January (GEw+), and a juvenile male at Woodward Res. in Stanislaus County on 14-26 January (JLD+).

A **Pacific Loon** floated between Amador and Calaveras counties on Comanche Res. on 8 February (JSL), and one along the American River in Folsom on 11 January–5 February (CCo+). A rare inland **Red-throated Loon** was reported in eastern Contra Costa County on 18 December (fide MSt) and another in Sacramento County waters of Folsom Lake on 5 January where they have been seen in recent years (CCo). A **Horned Grebe** at Marcum Road on 23 December to 15 January (JLg+) was one of few valid records for Sutter County. A **Brown Pelican** continued at Riverlake in the Pocket Area of Sacramento to 3 December (FC). Rare in Placer County, a **Cattle Egret** was along Moore Road on 13 January (SD).

**Mountain Plovers** were reported from a few traditional wintering areas, but a report of 678 near the western end of Utica Ave on 29 December (JLk) may be the record high count for Kings County. **Ruff** is nearly an annual winter visitor to the Los Banos area of Merced County, and this winter one was discovered on 24 January and remained to at least 5 February (GW, KVV).

**Western Gulls** are closely tied to coastal areas including the San Francisco Bay, but have been increasing in numbers and range at inland sites, especially in the Delta, Davis, and Sacramento areas. A first cycle individual was at Corcoran Res., Kings County on 4 December (SDS) for one of few county records. **Glaucous Gulls** were again regularly found at the Yolo County landfill, with two first cycle birds on 13 December (JCS) the first ones reported this season. A first cycle **Glaucous Gull** visited O'Neill Forebay in Merced County on 18 February (JML) and another was at the Recology plant in Stanislaus/San Joaquin County on 8 February (JC). **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** continued to be found at traditional locations for this Eurasian species, with an adult at the Yolo County landfill found in November seen until 9 January (SAbb) and an adult in the Placer County section of Folsom Lake on 29 December (EP+), while another adult at Woodbridge Road Crane Reserve on 22-24 February (DGY) was a first for San Joaquin County. Adding to the number of records of this rare species in Davis was an adult **Iceland Gull** (presumably **Kumlein's**) on 19-20 January (SCH, MPe) and a third-cycle bird photographed on 21 February (SCH). As in recent winters, **Thayer's Gulls** were widely reported from Kings County north to Yolo County. An adult **Mew Gull** was along Santa Fe Grade in Merced County on 8 December (CG). Most

of the few county records are from the Gustine WTP. A second-cycle bird was at 10<sup>th</sup> and Pueblo Ave in Kings County on 31 December–1 January (MSy+). Another adult was the first record for Sutter County on 21-29 January (JLg) and seen for several days afterward along the Feather River adjacent to the Marysville WTP. **Franklin's Gull** is a rare migrant in the region, but there are very few winter records, so one on Gun Club Road in Merced County on 22 December (KVV) was notable.

A **Long-eared Owl** roosted in trees in Grasslands County Park in Yolo County on 12 January (CGa) where this species has been found during previous two winters. The **Red-naped Sapsucker** found in November near Oakdale, Stanislaus County, continued to at least 16 January (JH, KPa+) and an adult male was a long-overdue first for Yolo County in Putah Creek Canyon on 13-19 February (TEa+). Two were found on the same day in Sacramento County in Rosemont and at Sailor Bar on 3 January (DB, Mkm). A female **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, discovered on 15 December (MSy), was joined by a female **Red-naped Sapsucker** on 27 December (KPa) that wintered at the Lake Success campground in Tulare County. Another was along Quail Canyon Road in Solano County on 17 December (ADeM). A **Hairy Woodpecker** at Lake Natoma on 7 January (EP, WEH) was a very rare find in Sacramento County where it averages one sighting every three to five years.

Kings County had a trio of rare flycatcher species present all winter with an **Eastern Phoebe** and an immature male **Vermilion Flycatcher** at Lemoore Sportsman's Club discovered on 1 December (MSy), and the first county record of two **Tropical Kingbirds** near the Hanford WTP found during the fall. Two adult male **Vermilion Flycatchers** wintered in Merced County, with one on Santa Fe Grade Road (where one has wintered off-and-on since at least 2006) and another at a private gun club (KVV). An adult male was near Bakersfield on 11 January (PF). In Stanislaus County, a female was with an **Eastern Phoebe** near Westley on 30 December (EC). Winter season **Western Kingbirds** were unheard of in California until recent years and are still considered very rare, so one along County Road 105 in Yolo County on 3-7 December (TEa, SCH) was noteworthy. A **Cassin's Kingbird** at Santa Fe Grade on 13 February (KVV) was a rare find for Merced County.

Of the "**Solitary Vireo**" complex, **Plumbeous** and **Cassin's** are very rare in winter but about equally expected. A bright **Cassin's Vireo** was at Tuolumne River Regional Park in Modesto on 21 January (HMR). **Northern Shrikes** are rare winter visitors in the region, so are always noteworthy. Juveniles were found in Sutter County on Pacific Ave on 28 December–6 January (MSch+), Butte County at the Chico airport on 30 December–5 January (TP+), and western Placer County on Phillip Road on 2 January (CW). Tree Swallow is the only regularly wintering swallow species in the region, so two **Northern Rough-winged**, eight **Violet-green** and two **Barn swallows** in the Los Banos area on

26 December (*vide* HMR) were remarkable. The **Winter Wren** found in November (JLD+) continued along Putah Creek Canyon in Yolo County through the winter. Two **Townsend's Solitaires** were found in Sacramento County, one at Lake Natoma on 7-8 January (EP+) and one at Gristmill on the American River Parkway 2-13 February (JML+). There are few winter records of this montane species in the region.

**Sage Thrashers** are annually found in the region, especially during their early spring and late fall migration periods. One, a first county record found in the foothills of Amador County near Lone on 28 January (GS) remained to at least 9 February and may have overwintered at this location where it fed on mistletoe berries. Another at Salt Springs Valley in Calaveras County (SN) was a likely migrant as it was found on 18 February during the beginning of the species' spring migration period.

**Palm Warbler** was the only vagrant wintering warbler species found this winter, with one at Prairie City in eastern Sacramento County on 3 January (CSw) and one in Rio Vista in Solano County on 22–28 February (JA+). The adult male **Summer Tanager** was documented for its third winter in Roeding Park, Fresno on 29 January (EE).

Rare on the valley floor, especially in winter, a **Green-tailed Towhee** visited both sides of the Stanislaus River at Jacob Meyers Park on 4-22 February (RB+) enabling birders to see it in Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties. **Swamp Sparrows** were at the Llano Seco Unit of Sacramento River NWR in Butte County on 23 January (FH), and Merced NWR on 2 January (ADeM). Another in the Nevada County foothills on 15 December (CrS) was one of few county records. In Yolo County, the north Davis **Harris's Sparrow** remained for its second winter (CD), while another was found near Cordelia Junction in Solano County on 18-19 December (MH). Rare montane finches were found, with one **Red Crossbill** over the Gristmill on the American River Parkway on 1 December (CIH, SD), one at the Odd Fellows Cemetery in Sacramento on 10 December (KSch), followed by 3-5 there on 19-20 December (DA), and 4 at Ancil Hoffman Park in Carmichael on 28 February (WEH). Two male **Evening Grosbeaks** were found on 9 December (EW) and one on 24 January (JTr) in Davis, one at the Sacramento City Cemetery on 8 December (GEw), 12 and 15 in Folsom on 12 and 16 December, respectively (SAbb), and five in Lemoore on 8 January (MSy) with three more in Centennial Park, Hanford on 9 January (ADeM) for two of few Kings County records. Best of all, a female **Cassin's Finch** was near Oakdale on 23 December–4 January (JH) for the first Stanislaus County record. The most exciting landbird of the season was the **Common Redpoll** found near Lincoln on 31 December to 2 January (JY+) for the first Placer County record.

Observers: Steve Abbott (SAbb), Dan Airola, Jan Allen, Ralph Baker, Jay Bongiatto (JBg), Summer Brasuel, Eric Caine, John Cant, Chris Conard (CCo),

Farley Cross, Jeff Davis (JND), Al DeMartini (ADeM), Scott Dietrich, Colin Dillingham (CPD), Chris Dunford, Jon Dunn (JLD), Todd Easterla (TEa), Elias Elias, Gil Ewing (GEw), Phil Farrell, Cory Gregory, Frank Hall, Mike Hall, Steve Hampton (SCH), Ed Harper (WEH), John Harris, Cliff Hawley (CH), Karen Kienitz, Tony Kurz (TKz), Jim Laughlin (JLg), John Lockhart (JLk), Don Marsh (DMr), Mark Martucci (MkM), Jenn McKenzie (JMck), Shannon Murphy, Susie Nishio, Frances Oliver (FrO), Kathy Parker (KPa), Michael Perrone (MPe), Mike Peters (MPt), Eric Pilotte, Tom Pritchard, Harold Reeve (HMR Ken Schneider (KSch), Mary Scheidt (MSch), Dan Skalos, Dan Smith (DSm), Jim Snowden (JSn), Mark Stacy (MSy), Gwen Starret, John C Sterling (JCS), Maury Stern (MSt), Fritz Steurer (FSt), Steve Summers (SDS), Craig Swolgaard (CrS), John Trochet (JTr), Kent Van Vuren (KVV), Charles Walker (CW), Ed Whisler, Gary Woods, David Yee (DGY), and John York.

Abbreviations used; NWR=National Wildlife Refuge; WTP=Wastewater Treatment Plant; WA=State Wildlife Area



Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*). 19 December 2012.  
Green Valley Rd, Solano County, California. Photo Linda Pittman.