

Central Valley and Foothills Bird Highlights: December 2013 through February 2014

John Sterling, 26 Palm Ave, Woodland, CA 95965
jsterling@wavecable.com

Trumpeter Swans are very rare winter visitors, and difficult to find as they can be a tricky identification problem. Five were near Nelson in Butte County on 1-4 December (JSn+) and six were in Lagoon Valley and Vacaville area on 22 December to 2 January (L&GS+) for the first Solano County record. **Brant** is a coastal goose. An immature at Colusa NWR on 14 December (MPt) was one of few Colusa County records. White geese are rare south of Merced County, so three **Ross's** and several **Snow Geese** near Corcoran in late December to 30 January made a few birders happy in Kings County (SDS, JLD, JCS).

Bridgeway Island Pond in West Sacramento once again hosted a large number of **Blue-winged Teal** with 56 counted on 14 January (DA). This is one of the largest wintering populations in the valley. A female **Barrow's Goldeneye** at Stony Gorge Res. on 21-27 December (JSL+) and another at East Park Res. on 28 December (KPa) were one of few records for Glenn and Colusa counties, respectively. **Long-tailed Duck** is a rare coastal visitor to California and even more rare inland. One on the Mokelumne River next to Bouldin Island on 16 January (DGY) was about the 5th or 6th record for San Joaquin County, one was on the Feather River in Oroville on 29 December (AE) for 9th Butte County record, and another was at Quail Lake east of Fresno on 1 December (JJ+). Once again the Redding area in Shasta County hosted a scoter, this time a **Surf Scoter** at the Lema Ranch on 28 December to 2 January (MS). A **White-winged Scoter** at Corcoran Res. in Kings County on 7 December provided one of few county records. Rare inland, especially in the foothills, a **Red-breasted Merganser** was on Salt Springs Valley Reservoir in Calaveras County on 4 January (DaW) and joined by an adult male on 21 January (DA). Singles at East Park Res. and Stony Gorge Res. on 26 December (JSL) were good finds in Colusa and Glenn counties, respectively; and another was on Corcoran Res. in Kings County on 28 December (SSt). Two were at O'Neill Forebay in Merced County on 26 December (*vide* HMR) where they are somewhat regular.

Loons are rare in many areas in the region, so two **Pacific** and one **Common loons** at Lake Kaweah were good finds in Tulare County on 18-23 January (KK, SDS+) as were three **Pacific** and two **Common loons** at Millerton Lake in Fresno and Madera counties on 31 December (JCS, JND, JSL, JSy, SDS,

JLD). A **Red-necked Grebe** at Stony Gorge Res. was the first record for Glenn County on 21-25 December (JLD+).

Three **Pectoral Sandpipers** were exceptionally late fall migrants lingering to 4 December at the Los Banos WTP in Merced County (KVV). A **Stilt Sandpiper** at the Kern NWR in Kern County on 22 February (BB) was in the Tulare Basin where this species is somewhat regular, but not annual in winter. Also nearly annual in winter, a **Ruff** was at the Los Banos WTP on 4 December (KVV), a different one was there on 28 December (ADeM, PJM), and one at the Ceres WTP, Stanislaus County on 28 January (JG) was the county's second record.

An adult **Little Gull** was at the Modesto WTP for the 4th Stanislaus County record on 26 January to 8 February (HMR, SSa, DG). This rare Eurasian gull has rarely been recorded in the region since the mid 1980s when several were found annually at the Stockton WTP. Not many **Glaucous Gulls** are found in the region each winter, so all are exciting finds including one at the Yolo County Landfill on 8-19 January (CD, TMcK), one at Corcoran Res. in Kings County on 26-30 January (MSy), one at Woodbridge Road in San Joaquin County (DGY) on 24 January, one at Modesto WTP, Stanislaus County on 23 February (HMR+), and two at Clifton Court Forebay in eastern Contra Costa County on 23-26 December (KR, JLx). Three different **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** visited the Yolo County Landfill with single birds on 7 December (SCH), on 7-14 January (WR+) and on 14-16 February (TEa, SCH, JML+). Solano County's second record of **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at the B&J Landfill on Hay Rd south of Dixon on 13 February (JM, DS) foraging with a **Glaucous Gull**. Solano County's second **Slaty-backed Gull** was discovered there on 7 February (RM). Other **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were one in the Tulare Basin on 30 January (JCS) for about the 3rd Kings County record, two at Bravo Lake in Tulare County on 21-26 January (SDS), and one at the Fresno WTP in Fresno County on 28 December to 31 January (MI+). The latter two were first county records. Two banded gulls found in Yolo County this winter were identified from band number returns (SCH). A **Western Gull** was banded as an adult on the Farallon Islands in 2007, and a **Thayer's Gull** was banded as an adult off the north coast of Devon Island, Nunavut in the Canadian Arctic.

The first valley **Inca Dove** remained in Tulare and was seen on 1 January (DF, SDS). Almost unprecedented on the valley floor, a **Northern Pygmy-Owl** was at Henderson Park in Snelling, Merced County on 30 December (DSw). A female **Costa's Hummingbird** was a treat to see at the Panoche Rd truck stop off Hwy 5 in Fresno County on 6-11 February (EE, JTz, JCS). A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was near Knight's Ferry in Stanislaus County 30 December to mid January (HMR+). An adult male was near CalExpo in Sacramento on 7 December (DaW), and a juvenile was in the Yokohl Valley on 29 December while a female wintered at the campground at Lake Success, both in Tulare

County (TKz+). A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was on Joslin Rd north of Vacaville in Solano County on 15 December to at least 8 January (KS+). In the lowlands of Kings County, two **Lewis's Woodpeckers** found at the oasis of Burris Park on 9 February (MSy) remained through the winter. A possible **Gyr Falcon** was reported from Bouldin Island, San Joaquin County on 16 January (DGY) was not photographed or subsequently seen despite searching for two weeks. We await the determination of the CA Rare Birds Committee for acceptance.

The male **Vermilion Flycatcher** returned to its haunts on Sante Fe Grade Rd in Merced County for another winter. It was first found on 3 January (KJ). The only **Eastern Phoebe** reported returned to winter at the Lemoore Sportman's Club in Kings County on 14 December (MSy). A **Solitary-type Vireo (Cassin's or Plumbeous)** was in north Davis, Yolo County on 24 February (CD) but could not be photographed or located again. A **Plumbeous Vireo** was photographed along the Sacramento in Yolo County on 22 December (CIH) for the 6th county record. A **Cassin's Vireo** was in Winters in Yolo County on 15 December (*fide* SCH). Cassin's and Plumbeous vireos are equally expected during winter. Only two **Northern Shrikes** were reported with one in Tehama County on Jelly's Ferry Rd on 2 January (BY) for one of few county records and the other near Lincoln in Placer County in late December (*fide* EP). **Sage Thrasher** is a regular, but rare winter visitor to the southern areas of the region, but one at the Yolo Basin WA in Yolo County on 18 January (RS) and another at Contra Loma Regional Park in Contra Cost County on 23 February T&CW) were far north of usual wintering areas. In Stanislaus County, one as at the base of Del Puerto Canyon on 16 February (JG) and another at Williams Rd in the eastern side of the county on 7-10 February (BD, JC. SSa+). **Townsend's Solitaires** are rare on the valley floor, so one at Babel Slough, Yolo County on 11-23 December (DA) and another at Lake Natoma in Folsom, Sacramento County on 23 January (CrS) were noteworthy. San Joaquin County's 4th **Chestnut-collared Longspur** was off Lathrop Rd in on 10 February (TMck), the only report for the region of any longspur.

Rarely reported in winter in the region, a **Hermit Warbler** was found at the Tuolumne River Regional Park in Stanislaus County on 24 December to at least 2 February (HMR+). The adult male **Summer Tanager** returned for its third winter at Roeding Park in Fresno on 15 December (PS).

The **Lark Bunting** found in November on Beckwith Rd, Stanislaus County remained through the winter. Although regular in a few scattered locations during the breeding season in the region, **Grasshopper Sparrows** are rare found during winter, so one on Nelson Ave nw of Oroville from 10 January through the period provided the first winter record for Butte County (MF+). **Swamp Sparrow** is an irregular winter visitor to the region but this winter there were more than normal: one at the Sacramento NWR on 2 January (JSL) for one of first if not the first Glenn County record, one along Putah Creek at

Pedrick Road from 16 January to mid-March (SM) in both Yolo and Solano counties, one at Lagoon Valley in Solano County on 28 December–1 January (DN+), and another at Merced NWR in Merced County on 15 February (KVV). A dark-lored **White-crowned Sparrow** wintered in north Lodi (DGY) showing characteristics of the eastern subspecies, not the Sierra Nevada breeding subspecies. Both subspecies are extremely rare in the region, with no records of the eastern in California. The **Harris's Sparrow** in north Davis, Yolo County completed its third winter at that site (CD). Another was at Caswell State Park in San Joaquin County on 10 February (TMcK). One along County Rd 306 on 7-27 January (JLx, FrO) was a great find in Glenn County. A male **Hooded Oriole** was at King's Island in eastern Contra Costa County on 23 December (KR+) providing one of few winter records in the region. A rare montane **Evening Grosbeak** was along Putah Creek between Winters and Davis, in Yolo and Solano counties on 5 February (JTr). This species is absent most winters in the valley.

Observers: Dan Airola, Bob Barnes, Judy Cooper, Jeff Davis (JND), Al DeMartini (ADeM), Chris Dunford, Bob Dunn, Jon Dunn (JLD), Todd Easterla (TEa), Elias Elias, Andy Engilis Jr., Jim Gain, Steve Hampton (SCH), Cliff Hawley (CIH), Marshall Iliff, Jake Jensen, Kent Johnson, Tony Kurz (TKz), Kim Kuska, Jeri Langham (JML), Sarah Mayhew, Tristan McKee (TMcK), Peter Metropulos (PJM), Joe Morlan, Roger Muskat, Dick Norton, Frances Oliver (FrO), Kathy Parker (KPa), Mike Peters (MPt), Kathy Robertson, William Rockey, Harold Reeve (HMR, Sal Salerno (SSa), Laurie and Gordon Schremp (L&GS), Jeff Seay (JSy), Dan Singer, Jim Snowden (JSn), Mark Stacy (MSy), John C Sterling (JCS), Susan Steele (SSt), Penny Stewart, Ron Storey, Steve Summers (SDS), Dale Swanberg, Michelle Swartout, Kirk Swensen, Craig Swolgaard (CrS), Jim Tietz (JTz), John Trochet (JTr), Kent Van Vuren (KVV), Dan Williams (DaW), Chris and Terri Wills (C&TW), David Yee (DGY), and Bob Yutzy.

CBRC=California Bird Records Committee; NWR=National Wildlife Refuge; WTP=Wastewater Treatment Plant; WA=State Wildlife Area