

Central Valley Bird Highlights: August 2007 through November 2007

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One of the highlights of the fall season was the Central Valley's and Merced County's first **Yellow-billed Loon** glimpsed and identified at O'Neill Forebay on 16 November (TaEa), then seen there subsequently on 19-23 November (ADeM, PF, KR). This is only the sixth inland location where this species has been found in California. A **Pacific Loon** at Lake Success on 12 November (TK) provided a rare record for Tulare County. Another was at Folsom Lake in Placer County on 14 November (BWe) where this species is somewhat regular. An early **Red-necked Grebe** was along Putah Creek at Lake Solano on 21-28 October (JCS+) for about the fifth Yolo County record and one of few for Solano County. Two **Red-necked Grebes** at Stony Gorge Reservoir and one at Black Butte Reservoir on 10 November (RS, CL, LL) provided the first Glenn and Tehama County records, respectively. The latter bird was still present on 27 November (EPa, FO). Another was on Lake Natoma along the American River in Sacramento County on 23+ November (SHo+). Tuolumne County's long overdue first record of **White Pelican** came with four on the large pond north of Hwy 120 near Hwy 108 on 7 October (EPa, CH). A **Glossy Ibis** at the Vic Fazio Wildlife Area on 25 August (ToEa ph., JCS+) was a first for Yolo County and only the second one found in the Central Valley. Two were found there on 10 October (ToEa ph.+). This species has been dramatically expanding its range westward from the southeastern United States and has recently spread into California, where first recorded in 2000. Rare in the western Sierra Nevada foothills, a **Eurasian Wigeon** at Goffinet Reservoir on 4 November (LL, CL) provided one of few records for Amador County. A rare inland **Long-tailed Duck** was at Gray Lodge on 3 November (PD) and another was at the O'Neill Forebay on 20 November (JLx, JSL, FO). A **White-winged Scoter** at the Feather River Fish Hatchery in Oroville on 17 October (SK) was one of few Butte County records of this coastal species. A **Surf Scoter** in a small pond along the American River Parkway in Rancho Cordova on 28 December (JLa) was a surprise as this species, of rare occurrence inland, is usually found in large reservoirs in the region.

An immature gray-morph **Gyr Falcon** in southeastern Kings County on 21-23 November (SSu, EPa ph.) was an extraordinary find. If accepted by the CBRC it would be the southernmost record for California and only the third Central Valley record.

A report of two **Black-bellied Plovers** at the northern area of Black Butte Reservoir on 24 September (KP) was one of few records for Tehama County. A **Semipalmated Plover** at the Salt Springs Valley Reservoir on 6 August (JSL, EPa, FO) provided only the third record for Calaveras County. The fourth record soon followed with three there on 24 August (JLx). This

species along with Black-bellied Plover, Dunlin, Short-billed Dowitcher, Pectoral Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, Willet, Whimbrel, phalaropes and others that are regular in the Central Valley floor are extremely rare in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Seven **Red-necked Phalaropes** at the sewage ponds in Valley Springs on 24 August (JLx) provided only the second Calaveras County record. Although a regular breeder at a few evaporation ponds in the lower San Joaquin Valley, a **Snowy Plover** at Lake Success in the foothills on 21 September (TK) was at an unexpected location in Tulare County for this species.

Two **Dunlin** near Black Butte Reservoir on 9 October (BED) and more on 27-28 November (EPa, FO, BED) provided two of few Tehama County records. Dunlin is common in flooded rice fields but this habitat is very scarce in Tehama County as compared to neighboring Butte and Glenn counties. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** on a small pond at Angel's Camp on 29-30 September (DM ph., FO) was a first record for Calaveras County. An adult **Red Knot** and **Sanderling** at the Woodland Sewage Ponds on 6-8 August (JHu, JCS ph., RA+) provided the second record of the former in Yolo County this year after this species had not been recorded in the county in many years. The Davis Wetlands typically attracts rare shorebirds during migration and this fall was no exception with an adult **Sanderling** and two **Semipalmated Sandpipers** found there on 5 August (ToEa, FSt, RA+). Also in Yolo County, a **Ruff** found at the Vic Fazio Wildlife Area on 9 October (ZS) was joined by a second bird on 19 October (ToEa) and two juvenile **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** on 25 October (ToEa). Butte County's fifth record of **Semipalmated Sandpiper** came from a flooded rice field near Nelson on 12 August (JSn). In Merced County, a **Solitary Sandpiper** was at the Gustine Sewage Ponds and a **Ruff** was along the Sante Fe Grade on 27 September (PM). Another **Ruff** was at the Gustine Sewage Ponds on 6 November (PM). At the Fresno Sewage Ponds on 21 August, the county's fifth **Red Knot** was discovered (GW). Nearby at the large ponds on Hwy 43 and Ave 56, an immature **Red Knot** on 1 September (JW, JLk) was an overdue first Tulare County record. A **Snowy Plover** was also present there. At these same ponds on 22 September, a **Stilt Sandpiper** was discovered (JLk) and another was at Pixley NWR on 9-13 October (SSt). This species is of annual occurrence in Kings and Merced counties, and may prove to be more regular in large flocks of dowitchers in neighboring counties. At Fresno Sewage Ponds birders were treated to a rare **Parasitic Jaeger** on 28 August (GW ph.+) for the second Fresno County record of a jaeger species. This is a common pelagic species that is occasionally found at large bodies of inland waters in northern California during fall migration. It was once thought to be by far the most common jaeger inland, but recent records suggest that it is less common than **Long-tailed Jaeger**. A juvenile **Long-tailed Jaeger** at the Davis Sewage Ponds on 25 August (JCS+) was probably the same bird seen flying over the Vic Fazio Wildlife Area on the same day (SE, ToEa+) and was only the third Yolo County record.

Although regular in small numbers in the Sacramento and Delta areas, an adult **Western Gull** on 20 September at the Davis Landfill (ToEa, JHu) seems early for this wintering species. Kutras Lake along the Sacramento River in Redding, Shasta County, and the Feather River Fish Hatchery in Oroville, Butte County are the best locations for rare gulls in the valley north of Yolo-Sacramento-Placer counties. Surprisingly rare north of Yolo-Sacramento-Placer counties and away from the gull hotspots in Redding and Oroville, a first-cycle **Glaucous-winged Gull** was along Hwy 99 in flooded fields near Bobelaine Preserve on 28 October (SGI, FO) for one of few Sutter County records. Similarly rare in this area, a first-cycle **Thayer's Gull** was at the Sacramento NWR in Glenn County on 28 November (JCS) and an adult **Western Gull** was in se Sutter County on 7 November (CH) for a first county record. A first-cycle **Mew Gull** was present at Kutras Lake on 29 October (RB) where this species is now an annual visitor, and another was joined by a **Glaucous-winged Gull** at the Feather River Fish Hatchery on 10 November (RS, LL, CL). In the San Joaquin Valley south of the Delta influence, **Mew Gulls** are still considered fairly rare, so one in sw Kings County on 19 November (ToEa, TaEa) and another at the Gustine Sewage Ponds in Merced County (ToEa, JCS+) on 16 November were noteworthy records. The Yolo County **Franklin's Gull** found on 1 July was last reported at the Davis Wetlands on 8 September (SHa) along with three juvenile **Common Terns**, with two terns remaining until 13 September (SHa). Possibly a different **Franklin's Gull** was at the Davis Landfill pond on 27 October (GE) and 11 November (RA). In Kings County, a **Sabine's Gull** at the ponds on the west side of Highway 41 between Jersey and Kent Avenues, and a **Franklin's Gull** in the Tulare Basin 14 September (JSe) was a typical date and locations for these rare, but regular fall migrants. Other **Franklin's Gulls** were at the Thermolito Afterbay in Butte County on 21 September (TM) and the Gustine Sewage Ponds in Merced County on 11 October (MR, MM, FT, RJ).

A first for the Sierra Nevada foothill region was a **White-winged Dove** attracted to feed set out for racing pigeons near Placerville during mid-August, which is a first record for El Dorado County, as well (DB ph., fide BWe). This species is a rare vagrant in northern California with the vast majority of records from the coast as far north as Del Norte County. Inland it has been seen as far north as Alpine County on the east side of the Sierra Nevada and Kings County in the San Joaquin Valley floor. The status of **Long-eared Owl** in the Central Valley and adjacent foothills is not well understood due to its nocturnal habitats and tendency to roost in dense vegetation. Therefore, one found at the Bufferlands in Sacramento County on 29 October (CC) was noteworthy. An immature **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** visited a feeder in Rancho Cordova at dusk on 26 September (ToEa ph.) for one of few records for Sacramento County and the Central Valley. A **Costa's Hummingbird** in the city of Madera on 6 November (MSM Jr) was a good find for Madera County, for which there are few records (*fide* JD). Last winter's

Red-naped Sapsucker returned to Larchmont Park in Sacramento County on 9 November (GE). A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was along Clayton Road in western Solano County 19+ November (RMu, JCS ph). Another was in Bakersfield in Kern County on 18 November (KK, BK).

Yolo County's first well-documented **Least Flycatcher** was at the Grasslands County Park on 20-24 September (ToEa+). A female **Vermilion Flycatcher** at Gray Lodge on 9+ November (TR+) was the third Butte County record. A **Red-eyed Vireo** put in an appearance along with many other migrants along Babel Slough on 10 September (AE) for the second Yolo County record. Another was at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 1 September (JTr). A regular fall migrant in region, single **Sage Thrashers** were near Folsom on 2 October (BA) in Sacramento County; and in Tulare County at Lake Success campground on 3 November (JLk) and near Strathmore on 11 November (TK).

The warbler of the season was the **Bay-breasted Warbler** found along the American River at Gristmill Park on 9-13 September (JLa, CC ph.+), in the same area in which a **Northern Parula** (ToEa ph.) was seen later in December. Birders searching that same area found a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** on 21 September (BA). This location has had numerous vagrant warblers in previous years. A **Tennessee Warbler** at UC Davis on 19 September (AE) was one of few reports for Yolo County. The Cosumnes River Preserve did not produce its normal share of vagrant warblers this fall, but an **Ovenbird** there on 3 November (SW) was an exceptional find. Lagoon Lake near Fairfield once again was the site of a rare fall vagrant with a **Northern Waterthrush** on 3-5 September (TJ, FSc, JC, JCS ph.). A **Prairie Warbler** at Hart Park in Bakersfield on 16 October (JSL) was one of few records for the Central Valley and Kern County of this species that is most often found in California along the coast. Rounding out the eastern warbler records was a **Palm Warbler** in Vacaville on 1 November (DBe) for perhaps only the second Solano County record. More **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** were found than expected with a male on the Solano County side of Putah Creek on 24 August (AE), a female at Hart Park near Bakersfield on 10 November (KK, BK, ph.), a male along the American River Parkway on 24 August (MMA), and a female in a Sacramento neighborhood on 14 September (MP). Three adult **Indigo Buntings** were found on the Cosumnes River Preserve on 5 August with two males still present on 12 August (JTr) including one feeding two fledglings for the first Sacramento County breeding record since 1996! Another male was along Cache Creek in Yolo County on 7 August (ToEa). A male in the cattails at Llano Seco on 5 October (MSk) was the second record for Butte County. Rare on the valley floor during migration was a **Green-tailed Towhee** at the Bufferlands on 17 September (CC); even rarer as a wintering bird, one visited a backyard birdfeeder in Rancho Cordova on 25+ November (TaEa, ToEa). **Brewer's Sparrows** are rare but regular migrants through the Central Valley, but are more common in the lower foothills along the east side of the valley during

spring migration. However, one on the valley floor at the Chico State Farm on 4 August (JSn) was unusually early for a fall migrant and was the first record for that month in Butte County. Other **Brewer's Sparrows** reports included one along Putah Creek on 24 August (AE) in Yolo County, one along the American River Parkway on 20 August (DJ), and one at the La BARRANCA unit of the Sacramento NWR in Tehama County on 5 September (MR). More unusual on the valley floor, especially away from preferred habitat, a **Bell's Sage Sparrow** was at the Cosumnes Preserve on 25 September (JTr). Only one **Chestnut-collared Longspur** could be found at the traditional site in the southern Dunnigan Hills area of Yolo County on 23 October (ToEa). However, one **McCown's Longspur** in sw Kings County on 19 November (ToEa, TaEa) provided a first county record.

An immature **Baltimore Oriole** along Putah Creek near Pedrick Rd. on 22 September (ToEa) was a first record for Yolo County and was also seen across the river in Solano County. As a very rare lowland visitor, one **Cassin's Finch** at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 4 November (JTr) was an exciting find and a first for that location for its discoverer.

I greatly appreciate the summaries of bird sightings for Yolo County generously provided by Steve Hampton (SHa). Other observers: Brian Accord, Roger Adamson, Dave Bell (DBe), David Bogener, Dan Brown, Ray Bruun, Joanne Castro, Chris Conard, Jeff Davis, Al DeMartini, Bruce E. Deuel, Pierre Domm, Tanner Easterla (TaEa), Todd Easterla (ToEa), Andy Engilis, Sid England, Gil Ewing, Peter Fahey, Steve Glover (SGl), Cliff Hawley, Scott Hoppe, Joan Humphrey (JHu), Richard Jeffers, Tim Jenkins, David Johnson, Shelly Kirn, Tony Kurz, Brenda Kyle, Ken Kyle, Jeri Langham (JLa), Cindy Lieurance, Les Lieurance, John Lockhart (JLk), Jim Lomax (JLx), John S. Luther (JSL), Mike Mammoser, Tim Manolis, Mark Martucci (MMa), Dan Maxwell, Peter Metropulos, (RMO), Roger Muscat (RMu), Frances Oliver, Ed Pandolfino (EPa), Kathy Parker, Michael Perrone, Tom Roach, Kathy Robertson, Michael Rogner, Mike San Miguel Jr., Jeff Seay (JSe), Fran Scarlett (FSc), Mike Skram (MSk), Zach Smith, Jim Snowden (JSn), Rich Stallcup, Susan Steele (SSt), John C. Sterling (JCS), Fritz Steurer, Steve Summers (SSu), Francis Toldi, John Trochet (JTr), Steve Walsh, Justin Ward, Bruce Webb (BWe), and Gary Woods.