

Central Valley Region Bird Highlights: June through July 2008

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A juvenile **Brown Pelican** at the Chowchilla Sewage Ponds on 30-31 July (GW, JCS ph., PF) was a first record for Madera County. Another at Turlock Lake on 19 July (JDe) for a second Stanislaus County record was found dead the next day (JSL). There are still very few records for the region, especially that far south in the valley. A bedraggled female **Common Goldeneye** found along the American River Parkway in Sacramento County on 27 July (JML) had molted flight feathers and undoubtedly summered locally. There are few summer records for the valley. Scoters are very rare late fall and winter visitors to the region, so an adult male **Surf Scoter** at the Fresno Sewage Ponds on 26 June (GW, JCS ph.) was a complete surprise and even more surprising when it could not be found on searches during the following week. It established the second Fresno County record.

An adult **Snowy Plover** at the Davis Wetlands on 29 July (EG, GE) was in Yolo County, where still regarded as rare, but an increasing number of records in recent years suggest that this may be an annually-occurring species there. Four **Black-bellied Plovers** at the Davis Wetlands on 4 June (SH) were at an unprecedented time of year for Yolo County. For shorebird records in early June, it is difficult to assess whether they are late spring migrants or early fall migrants. An adult **Pacific Golden-Plover** was found at the Madera Sewage Ponds on 22 July (GW) for the fifth Madera County record. Another on Sherman Island on 28 July (JSL) was in Sacramento County, where this species is usually only found rarely during migration. Elsewhere in Sacramento County, a **Solitary Sandpiper** along the Cosumnes River on 27 July (JTr+), a **Willet** at the Bufferlands on 25 July (CCo) and another at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 30 July (JTr), a **Marbled Godwit** at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 27 July (JTr+) and another on Sherman Island on 28 July (JSL) were all rare migrants for the county. Twenty-three **Marbled Godwits** at the Thermolito Afterbay on 17 June (JSn) was a huge flock for Butte County, and at an unprecedented time of year. Three **Marbled Godwits** at the Madera Sewage Ponds from 24 May to 6 June (BB) were the fourth Madera County record. Two adult **Stilt Sandpipers** at Davis Wetlands on 31 July (ToE, RA) were a treat for Yolo County birders. Another adult at the Ceres Sewage Ponds on 22 July (EC) was one of few Stanislaus County records. This species is regularly found in migration and winter in the Tulare Lake Basin, but becomes increasingly rare further north. Another “regular” rare shorebird, a **Ruff** at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 15 July (GE), was the first male in breeding plumage found in Yolo County.

A **Franklin's Gull** graced the Madera Sewage Ponds on 6 June (BB) for the second county record. Two **Least Terns** found on 27 June at the Bufferlands (CCo+) were a surprise and a first record for Sacramento

County. These birds proceeded to lay two eggs but were last seen on the nest on 31 July. Unfortunately the nesting attempt failed, but the pair continued to forage at the ponds until 5 August. At Black Butte Reservoir, a **Black Tern** was found below the dam in the borrow ponds on 22 July (BED) for one of few Tehama County records. This species is rare north of the rice country and wildlife refuges in the Sacramento Valley.

A **Common Nighthawk** was present from at least 12-21 June (SSk, CCo) along Meiss Rd about 2.8 miles from Dillard Rd in Sacramento County. At least one has been returning to this location since 1-2 pairs were discovered in 2005. Very rare on the valley floor, especially during summer, a **Band-tailed Pigeon** was along the American River Parkway at River Bend Park, Sacramento County, on 2 July (CLZ).

A potential first Sacramento County record came with the report of two **Cassin's Kingbirds** in eucalyptus trees on Sherman Island on 26 June (DW). Unfortunately, they could not be relocated during multiple visits by several birders and were not photographed. However, the descriptions of the birds and their vocalizations were good, so hopefully they'll return next year to be documented. This species is known as far north in the Central Valley at a golf course south of Tracy in San Joaquin County, but has been found further north than usual in recent years in Santa Clara and Solano counties. These kingbirds tend to be found in eucalyptus groves, so keep your eyes and ears open for them. A first Yuba County record of **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** was found near Marysville on 16 June (JLa ph.). **Bank Swallows** are occasionally found migrating in small numbers throughout the valley, but 89 at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 31 July (ToE) was an unusually large concentration for a non-breeding location. A **Purple Martin** near Guinda in the Capay Valley on 7 June was probably prospecting for a mate or a potential nest site in an area where nesting has not been documented since the 1960s (SH).

A **Brown Thrasher** was quite a surprise in a mist net at the Stone Lakes NWR on 10 July (SW, AP, MSc+) and was conveniently still present and singing the following day (CCo+; see p. 77 in this issue for details). A male **Northern Parula** found on 26 July in heavy molt undoubtedly summered locally in the Cosumnes River Preserve (JTr) and lingered through August. In Kings County, a singing male **Black-and-white Warbler** was in Lemoore on 11 June (MS) for about the second county record. Two territorial **Yellow-breasted Chats** along Cache Creek in the Capay Valley on 7 June indicated potential breeding—there are no confirmed breeding records for Yolo County (SH). A male **Bobolink** seen flying and singing over Granite Regional Park, Sacramento County, on 1 June (TCo) was one of few records for the Central Valley.

Thanks to Chris Conard (CCo), Bruce Deuel (BED), and Steve Hampton for supplying summaries of bird sightings. Other observers include: Roger Adamson, Bev Brock, Eric Caine, Terry Colborn (TCo), Joe Devine, Todd Easterla (ToE), Gil Ewing, Peter Fahey, Ed Greaves, Jeri M. Langham (JML),

Jim Laughlin (JLa), Cathy LaZier, John S. Luther (JSL), Ann Pellegrini, Mary Schiedt (MSc), Stefan Schlick (SSk), Jim Snowden (JSn), Mark Stacy, John Sterling (JCS), John Trochet (JTr), Dan Williams, Stan Wright, and Gary Woods.

Announcements

President's Message

Conservation Activities — The Central Valley Bird Club has had an exciting year, especially in joining several Central Valley bird and habitat conservation causes. The Board of Directors has been active in endorsing several advocacy positions including the “Save Our State Parks” campaign that lobbied to fight deep budget cuts in the state park system, and the rice as wildlife habitat education campaign. This latter campaign (see back cover of this issue) promotes public awareness of the critical role water plays in maintaining habitat for waterfowl and other aquatic birds when used in rice fields and recycled for use in public wildlife refuges. The CVBC also became a member of the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition (www.carangeland.org/index.html) and continues to serve as the regional representative in the International Bird Conservation Alliance (www.birdconservationalliance.org/).

Most exciting is the CVBC’s first venture into an organized research project. Headed by Zach Smith and Ed Pandolfino, the Winter Raptor Survey is in full force this year with several key volunteers helping with the surveys. Zach and Ed did an outstanding job in obtaining many grants from local Audubon chapters as well as from the California Rice Commission that will pay for Zach’s time in managing the project and for the volunteers’ car mileage expenses. I look forward to seeing the results from this winter and next. This project will be a very important piece in the California Rangeland Coalition’s advocacy for preserving large expanses of open space for raptor habitat, including the grasslands that encircle the Central Valley in the lower foothills.

Because the CVBC mission includes conservation, the Board agreed to create a policy regarding conservation messages on the Central Valley Birding listserve. In the past, only messages about birds and birding were allowed in order to keep the listserve from devolving into a free form discussion of conservation policy and politics. But the Board feels that one of the duties of the club is to inform members of conservation issues and that the CVBC needed to strike an acceptable balance for allowing a few informative messages on the birding-oriented Listserve. So the following policy was agreed upon by the Board: “by general agreement, the policy was established that announcements regarding conservation issues related to the Central Valley would be acceptable for posting when submitted only by