

Central Valley Region Bird Highlights: December 2008 through March 2009

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WATERBIRDS

The **Snow Goose** found at Pine Mountain Lake in Groveland in fall was seen again on 5 January along with a **Cackling Goose** and a **Red-necked Grebe** that remained for several weeks (DEQ, BZ), the grebe being only the third Tuolumne County record of that species. A **Ross's Goose** at a pond on Rosemary Road in the foothill region of Nevada County on 13 December (SR) was one of few records for that county. Always a treat to see, single, rare blue-morph **Ross's Geese** were found at Merced NWR in Merced County on 11 December and 24 February (PJM), and along Woodbridge Road in San Joaquin County on 8 January (DGY). A **Trumpeter Swan** photographed at Lake of the Pines 20 December (JML+) would be Nevada County's first if accepted by the CBRC. A female **Eurasian Wigeon** at Bass Lake, El Dorado County, on 14 January (GEw) was in the Sierra Nevada foothills where this species has been increasingly reported during the past decade. Three male **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** reported included one at Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento County, on 3 January (*fide* AEn), one at the Davis Wetlands, Yolo County, on 23 December (SCH), and Tulare County's third or fourth at Lake Success from 3-6 December (SDS, JLt).

Long-tailed Ducks appeared away from their coastal haunts with two at Kutras Lake in Redding from 13 December-1 January (RBr, RoS+) for Shasta County's seventh record, a female at Beale Air Force Base from 18 December – 13 February (JLg, JCS ph.) for Yuba County's first record, a female on the Feather River below Highway 162, Butte County, from 29 January-3 February (RyM, JLx, JSL+), and another on the Benicia waterfront in Solano County, where this species has been found nearly annually in recent winters, on 15 December (LHg). The male **Bufflehead x Common Goldeneye** found on 22 December at Lake Solano in Solano and Yolo counties continued through 10 January (JCS ph., WEH ph.+). What was most likely the same bird appeared in Collinsville in Solano County on 15 January (RMu). A male **Barrow's Goldeneye** found at the Marysville WTP on 16 December (KP), joined by a female on 19 December (JCS ph.), supplied only the third and fourth Yuba County records. A female along the west side of the Sutter Buttes on 27 December (JLg) was the third Sutter County record. This species is very locally distributed in California, and although common in a few locations, it can be extremely rare in other patches of seemingly suitable habitat. An adult male **Surf Scoter** near Beale Air Force Base on 22 December-5 January (JLg) was a Yuba County first for this

coastal duck. Another coastal species, a **Red-breasted Merganser** at Greenhaven Lake on 28 December (CCo), was in Sacramento County where it is found almost annually in winter. However, another at the Madera WTP from 18 January-2 February (PFa+) was only the third Madera County record.

Common Loons are rare on the valley floor, especially on sewage ponds, so one at the Madera WTP 1-16 January (LyH+) was a surprise and furnished Madera County's second lowland record. Very rare inland, a **Red-throated Loon** at Bouldin Island was in the Delta region of western San Joaquin County on 14 December (*fide* JRo). A **Brown Pelican** at San Luis Reservoir in Merced County on 14 February (KVV) was probably a lingering bird from the group found in November. Kutras Lake scored again with a **Red-necked Grebe** on 1 January (RMd). A **Pelagic Cormorant** along the waterfront in Benicia on 15 December (LHg) was a rare Solano County record of this coastal species that doesn't regularly venture far into the San Francisco Bay Estuary.

This winter saw the continued discovery and documentation of gull species formerly unknown or extremely rare in the region. Fifteen **Mew Gulls** were reported away from their normal Delta areas with up to 3 at Kutras Lake from 11 January-28 February (RBr+), one at the Feather River Fish Hatchery in Oroville Butte County, on 11 January (BED), three at Folsom Lake on 31 January (ToEa, JCS+), two at the Davis WTP on 31 January (ToEa, JCS+), one at the Nimbus Fish Hatchery on 31 January (ToEa, JCS+), one-two at the Ceres WTP from 19 January-2 February (EC, KP+) in Stanislaus County, one at Jack Stone Ponds on 14 January (MS) in Kings County, one at Buena Vista Lake on 21 December (*fide* SS) in Kern County, and one at the Fresno WTP, Fresno County, during January and February (KER, JCS ph.+). Rare inland away from San Luis Reservoir/O'Neill Forebay and the Sacramento/Davis areas, a first-cycle **Western Gull** at the American Avenue Landfill on 26-28 February (JCS ph., JSL, JLx, GaW ph.) was Fresno County's first record, and another (age not reported) at Buena Vista Lake on 21 December (*fide* SS) provided one of few Kern County records. Others found in typical locations included single adults at Folsom Lake on 14 January (ToEa), O'Neill Forebay on 24 February (PJM), and up to 4 at the Davis WTP from 14 January-12 February (ToEa, SCH, JCS+).

An unusually large influx of **Thayer's** and **Glaucous-winged Gulls** started in January as hundreds of each were at the Davis WTP in Yolo County and numbers elsewhere were at all time highs. Forty **Thayer's** and forty **Glaucous-winged Gulls** at the American Avenue Landfill on 26 February (JCS, JLx, JSL, GaW) were unprecedented numbers for Fresno County and the lower San Joaquin Valley. An adult **Thayer's Gull** at the Fairmead Landfill 25-27 February (JCS, JSL, JLx) provided a 2nd record for Madera, and a first-cycle bird at the Sutter NWR on 19 December (JCS) and an adult nearby on 21 December (JLx, JLg) were two of few records for Sutter County. The third Yuba County record of **Thayer's Gull** was an adult

discovered at the county landfill on 21 February (JLg), but several more seen subsequently in that area (JLg, JSL+) indicated that this species was not rare in that county this winter. An overdue first Madera County record of **Glaucous-winged Gull** was a first-cycle bird at the Fairmead Landfill on 25 February (JCS, JSL, JLx).

An **Iceland Gull** at the Davis WTP from 12 February- 28 March (ToEa ph., JCS ph.+) was nearly pure white and may have been of the nominate race. Other rare gulls there included two first Yolo County records, an adult **Slaty-backed Gull** on 27 February (ToEa, JCS, SCH+) that was also the first for the Central Valley, and three **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** with adults from 12-17 February (ToEa ph., JCS ph., SCH+) and 28 February-5 March (SAbb ph.+) and a second-cycle bird from 27 February-23 March (ToEa ph., JCS ph.). An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was below Nimbus Dam on the American River for the second Sacramento County record on 5 December (SNGH ph.) and a second-cycle bird was at Buena Vista Lake on 21 December (*fide* SS) in Kern County. The five records of this rare European gull this winter more than double the number all of the previous records for the entire Central Valley.

Among many **Glaucous Gulls** found in six counties were two rare adults, one at Sutter NWR on 15-18 December (JCS ph., JSL, ADe +) that provided a first record for Sutter County and another at the Davis WTP throughout January and February (JCS ph.+). A first-cycle **Glaucous Gull** at the Kern NWR on 1-4 February (KLv, SDS) was one of few records for Kern County. One at the Clifton Court Forebay on 19 January (ToEa) was in southeastern Contra Costa County. Another coming to roost on Folsom Lake in the Placer County side from 14 January + (BWb+) was not too surprising since tens of thousands of gulls roost there during winter. The daily high counts for this rare gull were three at the Fresno WTP on 26 February (JCS, JLx, JSL) and four at the Davis WTP on 13 February (JCS, ToEa), but undoubtedly many more moved through the latter location during January and February.

The region usually hosts a wintering **Ruff** and this period was no exception with a male at the Kent Avenue Ponds on 30 December (JSy), followed by a female there 31 December- 25 January (MS, JSy), both in Kings County. Another was nearby in Alpaugh from 16-17 January for Tulare County's third record (JLt, SDS). Three **Marbled Godwits** near the Gustine WTP on 30 January (EPa) were rare winter birds for Merced County. A **Wilson's Phalarope** at the Kent Avenue Ponds in Kings County from 2-20 January (MS) was one of few winter records in recent years for the Central Valley.

LANDBIRDS

Rare **Costa's Hummingbirds** were in Fresno County at Squaw Valley on 2 February (JW ph.) and 12 February along the San Joaquin River (JSy).

A probable male **Allen's Hummingbird** at Squaw Valley from 2-8 February (JW ph.) was early enough in the migration period to rule out a **Rufous Hummingbird** with a green back and provide Fresno County's first record accepted by local authorities. This species is not well documented in the Central Valley or the Sierra Nevada, although a scattering of documented records indicate that this species migrates in small numbers through these regions. A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Lost Lake from 27 December-19 January (JTz+) was the third record for Fresno County and the fourth for Madera County. Madera County's fifth record came shortly afterward with a male at the Dryad Ranch on 24 January (B&MR).

A male **Vermilion Flycatcher** was along Gun Club Road in Merced County on 1 January near where one wintered last year (WT). Unheard of in winter in California only a few years ago, but following on the heels of several November records in recent years, a **Western Kingbird** was described from Stone Lakes NWR in Sacramento County on 3 January (BT) and another was photographed the Yolo Grasslands Park south of Davis on 13 December (RM). **Cassin's Kingbirds** are very rare on the valley floor and rare but local along the western edge of the valley, so one found at the Merced NWR in mid-November and lingering until at least 24-28 February (PJM, JDe) and another in the city of Merced 8-28 January (JDe, SSa) provided exciting records for those areas. Another in Madera County in the eastern edge of the valley was equally rare and provided only the third county record (LyH). **Northern Shrikes** in the valley included one south of the Sacramento NWR on Norman Road in Colusa County from 7-12 December (DW, JCS ph.+), one along East Catlett Road in western Placer County on 24 January (GC), and one at the Valensin Ranch unit of the Cosumnes River Preserve on 14 January (JTr). A **Cassin's Vireo** at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 3 January (*fide* AEn) was a first record for the local Christmas Bird Count.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow is extremely rare in winter in northern California, so one south of Sacramento NWR in Colusa County on 9 December (JCS ph.) was unexpected. Increasing in winter in northern California in recent years, several **Barn Swallows** were found at scattered sites in the Central Valley. A rare valley floor **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** was discovered at South Side Park in downtown Sacramento on 27 December (AEn). Most valley records are from the riparian strips in the Fairfield/Vallejo area, along Putah Creek, and in Davis in adjacent Yolo and Solano counties.

A **Sage Thrasher** near Daulton in Madera County on 14 January (LyH, PFa, BBr) was on the eastern edge of the San Joaquin Valley where this species is most regularly seen in the region. A **Townsend's Solitaire** at Lake Solano along Putah Creek, Solano County, on 16 December (WEH) was in an area for which there were several previous records of this montane species. Among our rare wintering warblers, a **Yellow Warbler** was in Redding 4 January (DM) and another was on Staten Island, San Joaquin

County, on 14 December (*vide* JRo). There were no winter reports of eastern species of warblers!

An adult male **Summer Tanager** visited a yard in Orangevale, Sacramento County from 29 January-22 March (K&KO, CCo ph., EPa, JCS). The only report of a **Harris's Sparrow** was in Butte County at a Chico residence from 3-8 January (MSk, JLw). Up to fifteen **Lapland Longspurs** were along Leopard Drive on the Millville Plain in Shasta County 20-29 December (B&CY, RoS, BED, KB+). A **Chestnut-collared Longspur** was also there 21 December- 10 February (RoS, JCS, EPa+), ten were at Brewer and Nicholas roads in western Placer County on 30 December (ToEa+), and two were at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 3 January (AEn). An adult male **Hooded Oriole** was found in ornamental plantings at the Feather River Fish Hatchery in Oroville on 11 January (BED).

I greatly appreciate the summaries of bird sightings generously provided by Steve Hampton (SCH) and Ed Pandolfino (EPa). Additional Observers: Steve Abbott (SAbb), Ken Bachman, Bev Brock (BBr), Ray Bruun (RBr), Eric Caine, George Chaniot, Chris Conard (CCo), Al DeMartini (ADe), Bruce Deuel (BED), Joe Devine (JDe), Todd Easterla (ToEa), Andy Engilis, Jr. (AEn), Kevin Enns-Rempel (KER), Gil Ewing (GEw), Peter Fahey (PFa), Ed Harper (WEH), Lynn Hemink (LyH), Steve Howell (SNGH), Lisa Hug (LHg), Jeri Langham (JML), Jim Laughlin (JLg), Kelli Levinson (KLv), John Lewis (JLw), John Lockhart (JLt), Jim Lomax (JLx), John Luther (JSL), Roger Marlowe, Don Marsh, Ryan Martin (RyM), Peter Metropulos (PJM), Red Modeen (RMd), Roger Muscat (RMu), Karl & Karlin Oettle, Kathy Parker, Bill & Megan Ralph (B&MR), Dave Quady (DEQ), Steve Rose, Jim Rowoth (JRo), Sal Salerno (SSa), Rob Santry (RoS), Jeff Seay (JSy), Mike Skram (MSk), Mark Stacy, Susan Steele, John Sterling (JCS), Steve Summers (SDS), Jim Tietz (JTz), Wally Tordoff, Beatrix Treiterer, John Trochet (JTr), Kent Van Vuren, Jim Warner, Bruce Webb (BWb), David Wimpfheimer, Gary Woods (GaW), David Yee (DGY), Bob & Carol Yutzy, and Bill Zachman. CBRC = California Bird Records Committee; NWR = National Wildlife Refuge; WTP = Wastewater Treatment Plant