

Central Valley Region Bird Highlights: April through May 2009

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WATERBIRDS

Snowy Plovers are still rare outside of a few breeding locations in evaporation ponds in the southern San Joaquin Valley, so two at the Tulare WTP on 2 May (JLk+) and one at the Madera WTP on 16-25 May (GW+) were noteworthy. Large flocks of **Marbled Godwits** made news with about 100 at Corcoran Reservoir on 11 April in Kings County (MS), and 63 in Merced NWR on 20 April (PJM) were in areas where small numbers regularly occur. However, two in southern Sutter County on 28 April (KP) and one there on 3 May (JLa) were only the 4th and 5th records for that county. Also rare in Sutter



Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*) at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, Yolo County, 13 April 2009.

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County, a **Willet** on 4 May (JLa, JLx, JCS ph.) provided only the 2nd county record. The Madera WTP hosted one **Marbled Godwit** and two **Willetts** from 16-25 May (GW+) providing one of few Madera County records for each of these locally-rare species. At Colusa NWR, a **Solitary Sandpiper** on 4 May (DVP, LH) provided one of few Colusa County records of this uncommon migrant. A **Stilt Sandpiper** at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 13-14 April (Figure 1; EH) was joined by a **Ruddy Turnstone** on 14-16 April (EH, JCS)—both the first Yolo County records in several years. Another **Stilt Sandpiper** was at the Jersey Road ponds in Kings County on 25 April and 4-8 May (MS, SDS) where this species is somewhat regular with many wintering and migrant records. Pending acceptance by the California Bird Records Committee, a **White-rumped Sandpiper** would be the season's highlight. Found at the Jersey Road ponds on 15 May (HG, DaR), it would provide the 2nd Kings County and the 3rd for the Central Valley. Also present at these ponds was a late **Dunlin** on 22 May (RH) and two **Baird's Sandpipers** on 31 May (PS). A special CVBC trip into the Tulare Basin on 3 May yielded some great finds including **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, and **Red Knot** in Kings County (SDS, RH+), and **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Sanderling**, two **Snowy Plovers** and a **Baird's Sandpiper** in Kern County (SDS,

RH+). A second **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was off Kansas Avenue in Kings County on 5 May (SDS). **Semipalmated** and **Baird's Sandpipers** are much rarer in California during spring migration than in fall. Also in Kings County, a **Red Knot** was at the Nevada Avenue ponds on 8 May and two were there on 18 May (both MS), and 4-6 were at the Jersey Avenue ponds from 11-22 May (GW, SDS, JSy, RH+). In Merced County, a **Reeve** (female **Ruff**) on Henry Miller Road on 26 April (KVV) and another **Ruff** along Highway 165 at the West Bear Creek Unit of San Luis NWR on 20 April (PJM) were good spring finds of this rare Eurasian species. A beautiful, breeding-plumaged male **Ruff** at the Madera WTP stole the show for the 2nd Madera County record from 15-23 May (GW ph., JCS ph., JSL+). Large numbers of rare gulls lingered late into the spring at the Yolo County landfill with two **Glaucous**, one **Kumlien's/Iceland**, 39 **Glaucous-winged**, 56 **Thayer's**, and one **Western Gull** on 12 April (ToE). The latest wintering gulls were two **Glaucous-winged** and several **Herring** at the Davis WTP on 26 April (SH). A spring migrant **Franklin's Gull** was spotted off Utica Road in southern Kings County on 15 April (ADeM). Very rare inland during spring migration, a **Common Tern** was seen at the Jersey Avenue ponds on 8-9 May (JSy, MS), for one of few Kings County records. A **Least Tern** at the Madera WTP on 25 May (GW+) was only the 2nd Madera County record of this primarily coastal species that only recently began to nest in the Central Valley at the Tulare Basin and Sacramento Bufferlands (see page 39 of this issue).

LANDBIRDS

Although somewhat expected in most Central Valley and foothill locations during spring migration, a **Calliope Hummingbird** at the north edge of the Sutter Buttes on 3-5 May (JLa+) supplied only the 2nd Sutter County record. Migrant **Gray Flycatchers** on the valley floor are always fun to find, and this spring one was at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 21 April (EH), another Boggs Slough on 25 April and Hickey Park on 1 May in Kings County (both MS), one at Basalt Campground at San Luis Reservoir on 26 April and 3 May in Merced County (KVV, JR), four together at the BLM Alpaugh Nature Trail, Tulare County on 3 May (SAL, SDS+), one in downtown Corcoran, Kings County on 5 May (SDS), and one at the Nevada Avenue ponds in Kings County on 8 May (MS). At Thousand Oaks Park in Modesto, a female **Black-and-white Warbler** on 25 May (EC) and a female **Summer Tanager** on 31 May (EC, HR) established the 2nd records for each species in Stanislaus County. A second-year male **Summer Tanager** was at the North Davis Farm area on 17 May (SH+) for the 7th Yolo County record, and the Placer County male returned for its fourth summer in the foothills above Auburn on 21 May (LR). **Green-tailed Towhees** are rare spring migrants on the valley floor, so one at King's Row on 16 May (JSL, JLx) and other at the Nevada Avenue ponds on 18 May (MS) were great records for Kings County. A singing **Grasshopper Sparrow** north of Black

Butte Reservoir on 6 May (BED) was one of few Tehama County records, but in an area where breeding would be expected as they are found further north in similar habitat in western Shasta County. Until this year, **Hooded Orioles** were considered extremely rare in Kings County, so one visiting a feeder in Lemoore on 2 April (MS) was a surprise. Two more pairs were found breeding northeast of Hanford on 1 May (D&SR) and 3 May (SDS+). Another pair of **Hooded Orioles** in Marysville on 24 April through May (JLa+) was the 1st breeding record and only 3rd record for Yuba County.

Thanks to the following observers who reported their significant findings to the Club's listserver: Eric Caine, Al DeMartini (ADeM), Bruce Deuel (BED), Todd Easterla (ToE), Helen Green, Steve Hampton, Rob Hansen, Ed Harper, Lauren Harter, Jim Laughlin (JLa), Steve Laymon (SAL), John Lockhart (JLk), Jim Lomax (JLx), John Luther (JSL), Peter Metropulos (PJM), Kathy Parker, Harold Reeve, David Rice (DaR), Larry Risser, Diane and Steve Rose, Jennifer Rycenga, Jeff Seay (JSy), Mark Stacy, John Sterling (JCS), Penny Stewart, Steve Summers (SDS), Kent Van Vuren, David Vander Pluym, and Gary Woods. Abbreviations used: BLM = Bureau of Land Management; NWR = National Wildlife Refuge; WTP = Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Central Valley Bird Club Spring Field Trip Report: Tulare and Kings Counties

On 2-3 May 2009, Central Valley Bird Club members enjoyed a field trip to the southern part of the valley. The plan was to bird Tulare County on Saturday, have dinner and a program of talks on Saturday night in Alpaugh, and then bird in Kings County on Sunday.

Our first stop was the former Creighton Ranch Nature Conservancy Preserve, where we met our guide, Rob Hansen, on Saturday morning. Participants at this point were Carol Combs, Shelby Fetterman, John Lockhart, Jim Lomax, John Luther, Don Marsh, Mary Merriman, Francis Oliver, and Liz West. Before starting the tour, Rob gave us a short history of the Creighton Ranch, explaining that in the early 1980s the owners of the ranch and The Nature Conservancy created an easement to protect this last intact remnant of southern San Joaquin Valley riparian and marsh habitat. The property remained in private hands but was opened to the public during this period. Rob was hired to be the first manager. Later, after some disagreements between the land owner and The Nature Conservancy, the easement was dissolved and the area closed to the public, which is where things stand today. Rob still has some contacts and was able to obtain permission for us to bird here.