

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.

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## 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.

Migrants weren't as thick as I'd hoped but we were still able to find a nice variety of birds. The best sighting perhaps was of a small number of Vaux's Swifts flying low with swallows. Much of the time here we were treated to various aerial displays by several Swainson's Hawks. Five or six Green Herons were found along with a few Black-crowned Night-Herons. We were also treated to a few hundred Tricolored Blackbirds flying over in small groups. Altogether we found 50+ species of birds. It was a treat to get to see and bird this great native area of the valley normally closed to all public entry.

We said goodbye to Rob, Carol and Shelby at Creighton Ranch and headed south to bird other areas of Tulare County. We had stopped at a small pond along Highway 43 at the Homeland Canal, to look at a small colony of Great-tailed Grackles and a Burrowing Owl, when John Luther got a call about some birds seen in Kings County on Friday. At this point John Lockhart and Mary Merriman wanted to leave, and John wanted to scout out areas for a Big Day in Tulare County on Sunday, so the rest of us decided to reverse course and headed to Kings Row and Burris Park in Kings County. We didn't find the Calliope Hummingbird at Burris Park or the Hermit Warbler at Kings Row, the main targets of this chase. We did however find a White-breasted Nuthatch, Nashville and Townsend's Warblers, a bottle bush full of Black-chinned Hummingbirds, and a few other migrants. After that we drove around that very northernmost corner of the county looking at palm trees in yards until we found a very cooperative pair of Hooded Orioles, a county bird for all.

We then got a call from John Lockhart, which caused us to head back to Tulare County and the Tulare sewage ponds in order to see a Snowy Plover John had just found. It took us about twenty minutes to get there and we did see the plover, actually two of them, along with three Red-necked Phalaropes, a couple of Black Terns and a small variety of regular shore-birds.

That evening, we enjoyed a Mexican dinner in Alpaugh and then headed over to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Headquarters for a program of talks. Pam Williams, a wildlife biologist for the Kern National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) complex, gave the first talk on the Sandhill Cranes of the nearby Pixley NWR. We learned that the marshes of this refuge along Deer Creek are entirely artificial and now host a wintering population of 6,000-9,000 cranes. The cranes feed in nearby agricultural areas during the day and roost at night in the marshes. They come and go in spectacular early morning and evening flights. Interestingly, we learned that as the crane population at Pixley grew over the years the crane population on the Carrizo Plains to the west declined. Pam thinks that Pixley stole the Carrizo Plains' cranes!

Next up was Steve Laymon, project manager for the Atwell Island Land Retirement Demonstration Project. We learned about the federal government's farm land retirement program where landowners who wish to

retire from farming can sell their land to the government but still farm it until it can be restored to native vegetation. The farmers get to keep all their proceeds from farming in exchange for their free help with restoring the lands by use of their time and heavy equipment in this effort.

Rob Hansen, professor at College of the Sequoias in Visalia and conservationist extraordinaire, gave the last talk and slide show about the old Tulare Lake. Tulare Lake once was the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi River. It has now been reduced to a series of canals, agricultural fields, and evaporation basins. Rob's slides took us through the evolution of the once great Tulare Lake to the cotton fields it is today and how the water coming out of the Sierra Nevada is maneuvered to water those fields. However, even after such drastic change the area still teems with birds, just in a different way. Rob's talk previewed what was in store for us the next day.

Sunday morning found us birding the BLM Alpaugh Canal Trail with Steve and Pam. Steve showed us some of his work on the Atwell Island project and a few birds as we hiked along this trail. Migrants seemed a little more numerous here than they were yesterday and we found about 25 species in our hour walk including Great Horned Owl, Gray, Pacific-slope and Ash-throated flycatchers, Warbling Vireo, Black-throated Gray and Wilson's warblers, and a singing Blue Grosbeak. A female Black-chinned Hummingbird was found sitting on a nest. White-faced Ibis and a few Whimbrels flew overhead.

The rest of the morning and early afternoon was a special treat as Rob led us through the very private lands of the Tulare Lake Irrigation District evaporation ponds in the very southeast corner of Kings County. Many areas were dry, but this is a large area and we found several wetlands containing many shorebirds. The land bird highlights in this area were two Greater Roadrunners, a singing Bewick's Wren and a few singing Sage Sparrows. Good variety and numbers of shorebirds were found with some extra special treats like Semipalmated Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, and Red Knot. A small section of this area was in Kern County, just north of the Kern NWR. In this area we found several Snowy Plovers, another Ruddy Turnstone, a Sanderling, and a Baird's Sandpiper mixed in with many of the regular migrant shorebirds.

It was a great weekend and we found about 120 species of birds. Many county birds were had by all, from those starting with zero in both counties to those with well over 200 in both counties! I'd like to thank Rob Hansen again for his wonderful talk and for securing permission and leading us into some very special areas. I'd also like to thank Steve Laymon and Pam Williams again for their great programs and for hosting the talks.

*Steve Summers*