

Central Valley Region Bird Highlights: August 2009 through November 2009

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WATERBIRDS

A **Ross's Goose** at Goffinet Reservoir on 19 November (DM) was joined by a male **Eurasian Wigeon** on 28 November (DM) for one of few records of either species for Amador County. South of Merced County, **Ross's Goose** and **Cackling Goose** are rare in Kings County, so nine and one, respectively, at Corcoran Reservoir on 16 November (SDS) were unexpected. The second Central Valley and first Merced County record of **Black Scoter** was at the O'Neill Forebay at the base of San Luis Reservoir Dam on 10-25 November (KS+). This immature male was photographed and seen by many birders and provides one of few inland records of this coastal species in northern California. Also present at this site were a **Long-tailed Duck** from 20-27 November (ADeM+) and an immature female **White-winged Scoter** from 22-27 November (JLD). **Red-breasted Mergansers** are also primarily coastal, so one at the Thermalito Afterbay in Butte County on 9 November (EP) and another at Corcoran Reservoir on 15 November (MSt) were noteworthy. A **Red-necked Grebe** on Corcoran Reservoir 20-27 November (ADeM+) was an overdue first Kings County record. Another at Kutras Lake on 29 September–1 October (RBr, PH) was early for an inland record and about the fourth to have been found at this Redding location in Shasta County. An immature **Brown Pelican** at San Luis Reservoir in Merced County on 25 August (PJM) was at a location where several were found the previous year. **Least Bittern** is very local in the Central Valley, but with increasing restoration of marshes and summer water for wetlands, this species may expand its distribution into new locations. One such location, the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, now has another breeding record with two family groups seen throughout August (LC+). Prior to 2003, this species was unreported in Yolo County during the breeding season.

Snowy Plovers are regular breeding birds in the Tulare Lake Basin of Kings/Kern counties, so three at the Alpaugh Irrigation District Pond on 19 August (SDS) was not surprising, but raises hope that they may start breeding in Tulare County. Others were found at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 24 September (TEa), Chowchilla WTP on 15 September (CH) in Madera County, O'Neill Forebay on 12 September (KVV) and Fresno WTP on 20 September (PS). The rarest of the two golden-plover species in the Central Valley, an **American Golden-Plover** was at the O'Neill Forebay on 26-27 September (ADeM, PJM, KVV), and another at the Modesto WTP on 27 September (JG, EC). A **Pacific Golden-Plover** in a flooded field along



Figure 1. Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) at the Jersey Avenue ponds, Kings Co., 16 November 2009.

Photo © Gary Woods

Nevada Avenue on 13 September (JLx) was in Kings County, where they are not present every year. In the foothills, a **Black-bellied Plover** at Salt Springs Valley Reservoir on 21 September (JSL) was a first record of Calaveras County and a **Western Sandpiper** along White Rock Road on 18 September was a first for Mariposa County (JSL). A **Hudsonian Godwit** in a flooded field at 6th (Dairy Avenue) and Seattle Avenue in Kings County on 25 August (JLk) was accepted by the CBRC for the second Kings County record (first was last June) and the third for the Central Valley (first was in Merced in 1983). A **Marbled Godwit** at the south end of Black Butte Reservoir on 11 October (DRc+) provided a rare Glenn County record as this species is decidedly scarce north of Yolo County in the Sacramento Valley.

A **Ruddy Turnstone** at the Visalia WTP in Tulare County on 14 August (JLt) was joined by a **Sanderling** that afternoon (RH_a). Other rare, inland **Sanderlings** include one at the Davis Wetlands on 11 September (SH_a), one at the Ceres WTP on 14 September (DB) in Stanislaus County, and five at the Madera WTP on 15 September (JCS) and one the following day (PF_a), two at the Tulare WTP on 15-17 September (JLt, SDS, RH_a+) and two at the Gustine WTP in Merced County on 18 September (PJM). Somewhat more regular in Kings/Kern counties, a **Sanderling** was present on 14-22 November at the Jack Stone pond (MSt). **Red Knots** are rare in the Central Valley, but are somewhat regular in the southern San Joaquin Valley, with individu-



Figure 2. Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*) at the Fresno Wastewater Treatment Plant, Fresno Co., 15 September 2009.

Photo © John Sterling

als found this fall at the Jersey Ave ponds on 6 September (PS) in Kings County, the Fresno WTP on 15-17 September (JCS, JSL+), the Gustine WTP in Merced County on 18-26 September (PJM) and the Modesto WTP on 27 September (EC, JG). **Stilt Sandpipers** were reported at the Alpaugh Irrigation District Pond on 6 August (JLt) in Tulare County, and in Kings County along Pueblo Avenue on 21 August (JSy), and along 6th Avenue on 24 September and with two there three days later (JLt). This species is rare, but regularly found in the Tulare Lake Basin during fall and winter. An alternate-plumaged **Dunlin** at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area throughout August (TEa+) may have been from the Siberian breeding population as Eurasian subspecies migrate south prior to molting and would arrive in August as opposed to our **Dunlins**, which migrate in late September into November (and in basic plumage) (comment from JLD). In that same field, a juvenile **Red-necked Stint** was found and photographed on 30 August and 1 July (TEa, JCS+). Pending acceptance by the CBRC, this would be the first Central Valley record of this species and the first lower 48 state record for a juvenile of this species. Also in the same field, an adult **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** was present on 4 & 8 September (TEa, JCS, JM+). This is the first Central Valley record of an adult **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** and one of only a few for California.

Semipalmated Sandpipers were widely reported in the traditional locations, but two at the Volta Wildlife Area on 7 August (OsJ+) were in



Figure 3. White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) along the Tule River near Corcoran, Kings Co., September 2009.

Photo © John Lockhart

Merced County where very few have been reported in years past. A **Ruff** at the Stoil Pond in Tulare County on 18 September (JSL) and another at the Fresno WTP on 20-22 September (PS, GaW) were the only reports of this rare, but annual Eurasian shorebird. **Pectoral Sandpiper** is one of the latest fall shorebird migrants, so an adult on 17 August (KPa) along Lonestar Road was early and one of only a few records for Colusa County. Typical numbers of **Solitary, Pectoral, Baird's** and **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were located in areas where these species have been found in recent years.

The **Franklin's Gull** from July was still present at the Davis WTP until 5 August (RAd, ZS) and a different individual was at the Woodland WTP on 5 August (ZS). Others were found at the Fresno WTP on 5 August (GaW), the Stoil Pond on 6 August (JLt) in Tulare County, two in flooded fields on Pueblo Avenue in Kings County on 21 August (JSy), at the Madera WTP on 24 August (GaW), and two at the Fresno WTP (Figure 2) on 15-22 September (JCS, GaW +). **Western Gull** is a rare winter visitor throughout the Central Valley except in the Davis/Sacramento area and at San Luis Reservoir/O'Neill Forebay. An adult at the O'Neill Forebay first found on 5 August (CCo) provided one of few August records for the Central Valley of this mostly coastal resident species (and presumably the same bird was seen throughout the fall). A sick **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at the Jersey

Figure 4. A Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*) near Earlimart, Tulare Co., on 8 August 2009.



Photo © Alison Sheehy

Avenue ponds on 16-17 November (GaW) provided the first Kings County record, and first specimen record when it was retrieved after it died. The only **Sabine's Gull** reports were of juveniles at the Jack Stone Pond s. of Grangerville in Kings County on 18 September (MSt) and the Tulare Lake Basin on 26 September (JSy, RHa+). Three adult **Common Terns** flew around Hanford WTP on 7 August (MSt) for one of few Kings County records and an early fall record for the Central Valley. A search of O'Neill Forebay on 25 August yielded a Common Tern (PJM), but on 28 August both a **Common** and an **Arctic Tern** (JCS, TEa) were found. The latter was photographed for the first Merced County record. Five more **Common Terns** were there on 12 September (KVV). **Least Tern** breeds in sw Kings County, but remains rare elsewhere in the Central Valley. One at the Hanford WTP on 22-30 August (MSt, SDS) was a new location for Kings County and may have been a dispersing bird from its breeding grounds. An immature at the O'Neill Forebay on 25 August (PJM) was a first record for Merced County (now recorded in all San Joaquin Valley counties).

LANDBIRDS

White-winged Doves made news with one at Jamestown on 10 September (AJ) for Tuolumne County's first, and another along the Tule River near Corcoran (Figure 3) on 20-29 September (SDS, ADeM+) for King County's second. **Common Ground-Dove** (Figure 4) continues its spread into the San Joaquin Valley with the first Tulare County record of several birds around orchards near Earlimart along Road 168 about 1/4 mile west of Avenue 64 on 8 August (AS) and seen for many weeks afterward. This species was unknown from the Central Valley until they were found in orange groves in southernmost San Joaquin Valley a few years ago. A **Costa's Hummingbird** in Davis on 18-19 October (JTz+) provided one of few Yolo County records of this enigmatic species that could occur in any season in the Central Valley. **Lewis's Woodpeckers** were found on the valley floor in areas where

they are often absent, including several in Kings County where they are rare; at Hickey Park on 17 October (JLt+) and along the Tule River on 28 October (SDS). A female **Red-naped Sapsucker** coming to a yard in Solano County several miles south of Winters on 2-7 November (DB+) was close to Yolo County which has yet to record this species.

A **Least Flycatcher** at Grasslands Park south of Davis on 14 September (TEa) was the second record for that location and second documented record for Yolo County. A **Gray Flycatcher** there on 11 September (JCS) was the first fall record for Yolo County. This species is a regular spring migrant in the foothills and valley floor, but is extremely rare there during fall migration. As **Least Bell's Vireo** rebound and re-inhabit their former range in the Central Valley, we need to keep vigilant eyes and ears open for these birds. A singing male along the Tule River near Porterville on 11 September (SDS) added to recent records from Tulare County. An overdue first for Kings County was the **Plumbeous Vireo** found along the Tule River on 30 September (JSL). It was closely followed by the second record on 23 October at the Atwell Island (JLt, SAL). Another was in Porterville on 6 October (SDS) where previous records have occurred for Tulare County. The **Red-eyed Vireo** found in July was still singing at North Pond in Davis on 15 August (CDf). San Joaquin County's second **North American Dipper** was found on 24 October (LW+) at the Mokelumne Fish Hatchery and was joined by another on 12 November (PC). A **Townsend's Solitaire** was found at the Mokelumne Fish Hatchery by birders looking for the dippers on 12 November (S & DR), providing only the fifth San Joaquin County record. **Sage Thrasher** is a regular, rare fall migrant through the valley and foothills, so individuals on Black Butte Road in Tehama County on 11 October (JSL), O'Neill Forebay on 26 September – 23 October (PJM, ADeM, MS), and Lodi WTP 5-6 November (S & DR, JLx) fit the known pattern of occurrence.

Yolo County's fifth report of a **Tennessee Warbler** came from north Davis ponds on 28-29 September (SHa, JCS). The female **Northern Parula** found in July was still at North Pond in Davis on 3 August (RAD). A **Black-and-white Warbler** in Thousand Oaks Park in Modesto on 20 September (EC) provided the third Stanislaus County record. King County's first **Palm Warbler** was at Hickey Park on 16 October (ADeM). There are surprisingly few records of this vagrant in the Central Valley compared to the coast. A **Blackpoll Warbler** along Putah Creek near the Pedrick Road bridge on 26 September (MP) was the only one reported this fall for the region and provided the tenth record for Yolo County. A female **Hooded Warbler** at Glen Hall Park in Sacramento on 19-20 September (DKo, KT) was one of few fall records for the region. A **Yellow-breasted Chat** at the O'Neill Forebay on 18 September (PJM) and another in Davis on 26 September (SHa) were late fall migrants.

A **Summer Tanager** near Winters on 7 August (VR) was unusually early for a fall vagrant and one of few records for Yolo County. **Grasshopper Sparrow** is a highly local and sparse breeder in the region, and winter

records are scarce. Thus one at Woodbridge Road on 21 November (LHa, DVP+) was one of few San Joaquin County records for any season and only the second fall/winter record. A **Grasshopper Sparrow** on 7 September (OsJ) was at the edge of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area field where the Red-necked Stint had resided a few days before. Another was at the Gustine WTP on 26 September (PJM, ADeM) for a rare migrant record for Merced County. A **Brewer's Sparrow** at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 10 October (SHo) was Yolo County's sixth record. This species is much more regularly seen on the eastern side and southern end of the Central Valley, especially during spring. The only **Swamp Sparrow** report was from the Jepson Prairie area on 18 November (ADeM) in Solano County. We usually get a few longspurs in the region in late fall, but the only report received this fall was of two **Lapland Longspurs** on Leopard Road in Shasta County on 9 November (EP, ZS).

I greatly appreciate the summaries of bird sightings for Yolo County generously provided by Steve Hampton (SHa) and the Middle Pacific Coast Regional Report provided by Ed Pandolfino (EP). Other observers: Roger Adamson (RAd), David Bell, Ray Bruun (RBr), Eric Caine, Lyann Comrack, Chris Conard (CCo), Pat Croft, Al DeMartini, Jon Dunn (JLD), Christopher Dunford (CDf), Todd Easterla (TEa), Peter Fahey (PFa), Jim Gain, Chris Hiatt, Rob Hansen (RH), Lauren Harter (LHa), Pablo Herrera, Scott Hoppe (SHo), Alvaro Jaramillo, Oscar Johnson (OsJ), Dan Kopp (DKo), Steve Laymon (SAL), John Lockhart (JLt), Jim Lomax (JLx), John Luther (JSL), Jeff Mangum, Don Marsh, Peter Metropulos (PJM), Kathy Parker (KPa), Michael Perrone, David Rice (DRc), Steve and Dianne Rose (S & DR), Vance Russell, Ken Schneider, Jeff Seay (JSy), Alison Sheehey, Zach Smith, Mark Stacey (MSt), John Sterling (JCS), Marie Stewart, Penny Stewart, Steve Summers (SDS), Jim Tietz (JTz), Kevin Thomas, Kent Van Vuren, David Vander Pluym (DVP), Liz West, and Gary Woods (GaW). Abbreviations used: WTP=Wastewater Treatment Plant; CBRC=California Bird Records Committee; NWR=National Wildlife Refuge.