

Central Valley Region Bird Highlights: December 2009 through February 2010

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Merced County is the southernmost part of the normal range for white geese and swans in the valley. So four **Tundra Swans** flew over the Jersey Avenue ponds in Kings County on 10 January (JSy) and three **Ross' Geese** on Corcoran Reservoir, King County, on 13 December (MSy) were noteworthy. Equally rare south of Merced, a **Cackling Goose** was on Corcoran Reservoir on 22 December (MSy). Another along the western edge of Mariposa County on 22 December (LY+) was one of few county records. Along Gun Club Road in Merced County, a male **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** was found on 24 January (DM, PJM). Yolo County's fourth **Tufted Duck**, a male, was at the Davis Wetlands on 16 January (ToEa, KvG). Another was refound at Clifton Court Forebay, Contra Costa County, on 5 February (RS, SSc). Sacramento County's third was near Sherman Island 16-17 February (BBf, JCS+). It was joined by 3 and 5 **Surf Scoters**, respectively on 17 and 19 February (JCS, EP). Eighty **Greater Scaup** near Sherman Island 16 February to 13 March was perhaps the high count for Sacramento County (fide CCo). A female **Barrow's Goldeneye** was along West Butte Road on 1 January (JLg). This is the location for all of the handful of records for Sutter County. Another female in Red Bluff on 6 February (BED) was also a rare find in Tehama County. The **Long-tailed Duck** found in November was joined by a male **White-winged Scoter** at the O'Neill Forebay, Merced County, on 27 December (RbF) and both were seen again on 4 January (KP). Kutras Lake is a traditional spot for wintering **Red-breasted Mergansers** in the valley, but five there on 29 December (RBr) was a high count. **Common Loons** are very rare on the valley floor away from traditional locations, so one at the Turning Basin in West Sacramento on 16-25 January (ToEa, SCH) was noteworthy as the first Yolo County record in several years. Even more unusual was the **Red-throated Loon** on Folsom Lake, Sacramento and El Dorado counties, from 3 January to 14 February (CCo+). The **Red-necked Grebe** on Corcoran Reservoir lingered to 4 December (BB) after its mid-November discovery.

Wintering **Swainson's Hawks** have been found in increasing numbers over the past decade and over a wider area in the valley. One was over Chico, Butte County, on 2 December (SK), another was over Putah Creek near Davis, Yolo/Solano counties, on 3 December (JCS), three were over Davis on 30 January (LB) and one was over West Hills College campus in Lemoore, Kings County, on 13 December (MSy). More surprising was the light morph **Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk** along Road 29 west of Road 94 in Yolo County from 4 January through the winter period (BS+). Three dark morph **Harlan's Hawks** were in Yolo County in Zamora, 7 January (RAd, BWb), near Road

Figure 1. Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondii*) in Davis, Yolo County, 9 March 2010.

photo © Daniel Lee Brown

14 just west of Interstate 505 on 25 February (RAd) and another the same day near Dixon, Solano County (ZS). A dark morph was at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 20 February (JTr).



Mew Gulls are rare in the valley away from Sacramento and Yolo counties and the Delta region. One adult was at the north shore of Comanche Reservoir on 3 December – 17 January (DB, CCo+). A first-cycle **Glaucous Gull** in District 10 north-east of Marysville on 1 December (JH) provided only the second record for Yuba County. This species is very rare in the Central Valley away from large gull concentrations in the Davis- Sacramento area. A **Glaucous-winged Gull** at the Fairmead Landfill on 11 December (LyH, CH) was only the third Madera County record. It has now been observed at that location for each of the past three years and may prove to be annually found there in the large flock of wintering gulls. Another adult was along Nevada Avenue in southeastern Kings County on 10 January (JSy). On 21 December, a third individual at Buena Vista Lake, Kern County, was joined by a very rare **Western Gull** and numerous **Thayer's Gulls** (SS). A third-cycle **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at the Davis Landfill on 16 January (ToEa, KvG) may have been a bird returning from last winter. It is the fourth record for Yolo County.

Long-eared Owls are scarce but regular winter visitors to the valley floor and are difficult to find in their roost trees. One found at Grasslands Park south of Davis on 16 January – 17 February (ZS+) provided one of few Yolo County records. Two more were in Sacramento County with one at Sailor Bar along the American River on 5 December (TFi) and another in Carmichael on 5 January (GL). A **Greater Roadrunner** was near Brentwood on 25 February (LS). This species is extremely rare in Contra Costa County, but it is known to wander on occasion. **Red-naped Sapsuckers** are rare, but annual fall and winter visitors to the valley. Two were reported in Sacramento County with one at Lake Natoma on 3 January (MaS) and the other in the Pocket neighborhood on 18 February to the end of the winter period (EP+).

A rare wintering **Hammond's Flycatcher** in Davis (Figure 1) was discovered on 5 December and seen throughout the period (CD+). A "**Western**" **Flycatcher** (probably Pacific-slope) at Cosumnes River Preserve on 5 January (WEH) was also unusual. Most winter records of Empidonax flycatchers in northern California are Pacific-slope and Hammond's. The only **Vermilion Flycatcher** this winter was near Buena Vista Lake on 21 December (FG+). Sacramento County's second winter **Plumbeous Vireo** (Figure 2) was seen in Southside Park from 11 February to the end of the winter period (CCo+). **Sage Thrashers** are rare, but annual fall and spring migrants. There are few winter season records. One in southwestern Kings County on 6 December (JLk) and another in Redding on 8-27 December (RoS, JLx+) were unexpected. Much more unusual was the **Brown Thrasher** that wintered near Buena Vista Lake and discovered on 21 December (ADe, AS). The **American Dipper** found in October at the Mokelumne Fish Hatchery, San Joaquin County, was still present on 17 January (CCo).

The best landbird record of this season was of the **Yellow-throated Warbler** photographed (fide JSL) in Benicia on 20 December, but it could not be relocated. This is a first Solano County record and one of few winter records for northern California of this eastern species. Very rare inland during winter, a **Nashville Warbler** and a **Hermit Warbler** were at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 5 January (WEH, AEn). Also very rare in winter, a **Black-headed Grosbeak** visited a feeder in Sutter Creek, Amador County on 7 December (MPt).



Figure 2. Plumbeous Vireo (*Vireo plumbeus*) at Southside Park, Sacramento, Sacramento County, 6 March 2010.

photo © Linda Pittman



Figure 3. Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) along Riley Road, Sacramento County, 8 January 2010.

photo © Craig Swolgaard

Lark Buntings sometimes winter in the valley, and this year one was near the Cosumnes River Preserve (Figure 3) on 5-18 January (AEn+). A **Brewer's Sparrow** in Lemoore on 13 December (MSy) was a first winter season record for Kings County. The Fox Sparrow complex may be split in the future, so keeping track of subspecies is becoming increasingly common for birders in the valley. This winter, three **Red Fox Sparrows** were in Sacramento County. This is a fairly rare bird in California. They were found at the Gristmill along the American River on 5 December (SD), at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 5 December (JTr), and at Stone Lakes NWR on 5 January (fide CCo). A **Harris' Sparrow** in Anderson, Shasta County, returned from last winter on 15 February (fide JCS). Yolo County had longspur reports with a **McCown's Longspur** at a traditional spot along County Line Road near Browning Road on 22 (ToEa, KvG), and a **Chestnut-collared Longspur** at the intersection of Roads 27 and 102B on 23 January (ToEa). Another **Chestnut-collared Longspur** was found on the Cosumnes River Preserve on 5 January (AEn).

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Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) at Beal's Point, Folsom Lake, Placer County, 4 January 2010.

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