

## Central Valley Bird Highlights: December 2011 through February 2012

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The bird of the season was a beautiful male **Falcated Duck** from Siberia found at the Colusa NWR (DT, GF) on 8 December, and seen through 10 February by thousands of birders visiting from across North America. This is the first Central Valley and third California record. (For details see *Tankersley, D. 2011. Falcated Duck discovered in California's Central Valley. Central Valley Bird Club Bulletin 14:93-97.*)

Two adult **Trumpeter Swans** photographed in ag fields of western Tulare County on 8-10 December (DF, SDS) documented the first county record. A family group was also well documented with photographs along Esquon Road in Butte County on 31 December (JLg). Merced County is the southernmost part of the normal range for white geese and swans in the valley. In Kings County, where white geese are rare, two **Snow Geese** were at the Jersey Ponds on 12 December, six were along 6<sup>th</sup> Ave south of Virginia Ave on 24 December, and three were at Corcoran Ponds in addition to 14 **Ross's Geese** at Utica and 6<sup>th</sup> Ave on 8 January (all MSy). Another **Ross's Goose** was at the Corcoran Reservoir in Kings County on 10 December and two Cackling Geese were there on 17 December (MSy). Further south at the Kern Water Bank, seven **Snow Geese** and two **Greater Scaup** were present on 12 December (JCS). Single male **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** were found at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 17 December (TJ) and Sacramento NWR in Glenn County on 17 January (CCx). This subspecies from Siberia is found nearly every winter in the Central Valley.

A female **Barrow's Goldeneye** photographed at the Kern Water Bank on 26 January (JCS) was only the third documented record for Kern County. Nearly annual in the region during winter, a **Tufted Duck** was found on 9 January at Clifton Court Forebay—where this rare Siberian species has occurred in prior years (BG). It remained to at least 10 February when it was seen with a **White-winged** and a **Surf Scoter** and two **Red-breasted Mergansers** (AL). A **White-winged Scoter** was on Kutras Lake, Shasta County on 10 December (FS) as was the **Black Scoter** first found over the previous summer (DMr) and seen through the winter. Also exciting was the **White-winged Scoter** on O'Neill Forebay in Merced County on 15-22 January (EB, KVV). Other rare inland single **Red-breasted Mergansers** were in the Port of Stockton from 1-12 (DY, JCS), on Lake Success, Tulare County on 17 December (TKz), and on Woodward Reservoir, Stanislaus County on 1 December (RB,

KPa). One on the O’Neill Forebay, Merced County on 5 December (KVV) was at a location where this species is found almost annually.

The **Pacific Loon** found in November at Woodward Reservoir in Stanislaus County was still present on 1 December (SSa, KPa). One was on the O’Neill Forebay on 5 December (KVV). The **Pacific Loon** found in November at the Koster Road Gravel Pit pond in SW San Joaquin County was still present through at least 11 December (JCS, ADeM). Three other **Pacific Loons** were on Kutras Lake in Redding, Shasta County with one present from the fall through the winter and two more joining it on 15 December (LJ, MtB). Much rarer inland, a **Red-throated Loon** was found on Folsom Lake on 7 December and remained for several weeks while floating between Placer, Sacramento and El Dorado counties (BWB). A rare inland **Red-necked Grebe** found plenty of food at a small fishpond near Santa Nella, Merced County from 5-27 February (JF, HH). The “resident” juvenile **Brown Pelican** remained at the Port of Sacramento through the winter (MW). This was only the third Yolo County record. Another juvenile found in November at the Koster Road Gravel Pit pond in SW San Joaquin County was still present on 11 December (JCS). Seven **Cattle Egrets** along Sunset Blvd in western Placer County on 2 December (DeR) were significant as there are only a few county records of this locally distributed species.

Five different **Harlan’s Hawks** in San Joaquin County (DGY) was an unprecedented number for that county during one winter. Others were noted at Colusa NWR (JCS) and about four in Yolo and Solano counties (ZS, SCH). This subspecies breeds in the northern Rocky Mountains of Canada and Alaska and is generally a rare winter visitor to California. A **Rough-legged Hawk** wintered near Kettleman City—this northern species is now rarely found this far south in the region.

Another highly localized species, the **Mountain Plover**, was present off Progress and Oswald roads just west of Sutter NWR on 17 December–7 January (JLg). This flock of 16 plover is only the second Sutter County record in many decades—including a record last year near the southern edge of the county. Also rare in Fresno County, a flock of 130 plovers was found along Hwy 33 north of Manning on 30-31 January (GW). **Marbled Godwits** are rare in winter, but two near the Santa Fe Canal in Merced County on 2 December (CG) were in an area where they have been found in previous winters. A **Ruff** found near Gustine in Merced County in November (KVV) was joined by a female, also known as a Reeve, on 24 January (MSw). Another **Ruff** was found at the Cosumnes Preserve in Sacramento County on 3 January (JTr, WEH). **Sanderlings** are generally rare in the Central Valley, but they are regularly found in the Tulare Basin. One wintered there at the Jack Stone Ponds in Kings County (MSy). Two-to-four rare wintering **Wilson’s Phalaropes** were on the Jersey Ave Ponds in Kings County on 9 December (MSy).

The **Lesser Black-backed Gull** found in the fall in Kings County remained through at least 18 February (EHU). An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** with an adult **Glaucous Gull** were at the Yolo County Landfill on 10 December (SCH). A first cycle **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was reported from the Placer County side of Folsom Lake on 1 February (RP). The status of coastal gulls in the lower San Joaquin Valley and Tulare Basin is becoming clearer with each winter as birders have been focused on documenting these gulls. A first cycle **Glaucous Gull** was near Los Banos on 11 February (KVV) and another was Tulare and Kings Counties near or on the Homeland Canal 3-14 February (DF, JCS). Two more were at the Modesto WTP on 30 December (HMR). This species is much more likely to be found in the Delta and Sacramento/Yolo counties than elsewhere in the Central Valley. A **Thayer's Gull** and two **Glaucous-winged Gulls** were in southeastern Kings County on 24 December (MSy). These two species are becoming increasingly documented in the San Joaquin Valley and Tulare Basin. Three **Mew Gulls** (high count for Kings) and one **Glaucous-winged Gull** were in a flooded field at 18<sup>th</sup> Ave and Flint Ave in Kings County on 4 December (MSy). A **Mew Gull** was on Corcoran Reservoir in Kings County on 17 December (MSy) and three were at Kutras Lake, Shasta through the winter where this species is now annually found (BY+). The Recology Plant at the county line in western Stanislaus/San Joaquin counties was full of "coastal" gulls once again. Hundreds of **Thayer's**, **Glaucous-winged** and **Western gulls** were present throughout the winter and were joined by a **Glaucous Gull** on 7 January (JHG).

A **Long-eared Owl** roosting at the Basalt Campground at San Luis Reservoir, Merced County on 25 February may have been the first record for that location (KVV). This cryptic species is always difficult to find in densely vegetated roost sites in the valley and is probably more common than currently known. **Costa's Hummingbirds** have been found during all seasons in the Central Valley but are always rare, so a male visiting a feeder in Chico from 23 December through much of the winter was a noteworthy find for Butte County (SK, JBg). Another male visited a feeder in Lemoore, Kings County starting on 24 December (MSy). Unprecedented in the Central Valley and extremely unusual anywhere in California during winter was the male **Black-chinned Hummingbird** coming to a feeder in El Dorado Hills, El Dorado County on 26 December (BA, KR) and another in Lodi, San Joaquin County from 23 February–2 March (JK). Rare but regular in the Central Valley in winter, a **Red-naped Sapsucker** was near Lake Success on 17 December (TKz) and another was at East Lawn Cemetery in Sacramento from 13 December through the end of winter (MG+). There are still no records for neighboring Yolo County. Equally rare was the adult male **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Micke Grove, Stockton in San Joaquin County on 18 December (FrO, JK) and one on Cantelow Road in Solano County on 18 December (*fide* SCH).

All *Empidonax* flycatchers are rare in winter. **Hammond's** and **Pacific-slope flycatchers** are the most likely to occur in winter, but there have been a wintering **Dusky**, **Least** and **Gray flycatchers** in recent years, so it is very important to obtain good photographs of these birds and describe their calls for documentation. A **Hammond's Flycatcher** along the Calaveras River at N. Sheldon Road on 31 December–7 January was a first for winter in San Joaquin County (FrO, DGY+). Other **Hammond's Flycatchers** were near Springville, Tulare County on 17 December (SDS), another at below Friant Dam in Fresno County on 31 December–3 January (JTz, EE), and another found the same day in Oakdale, Stanislaus County (JH) that lingered until 3 January. Much more surprising was the **Dusky Flycatcher** photographed at Caswell Memorial State Park in San Joaquin County on 17-18 January (JND). A "**Western**" (**Pacific-slope or Cordilleran**) **Flycatcher** was at Burris Park on 17 December–14 January (MSy) for what is likely the first winter record of an *Empidonax* in Kings County. A **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** was seen and heard at the Cosumnes Preserve in Sacramento County on 15 January (JTr). A male **Vermilion Flycatcher** wintered at the Valley Oaks Golf Course in Visalia, Tulare County (SDS). The kingbird calling in Folsom, Sacramento County on 12 December (SAbb) was mostly likely a very rare wintering **Western Kingbird** although **Couch's Kingbird** could not be ruled out (only one record for the state). A **Cassin's Kingbird** at the Tracy WTP on 5-9 December provided the first winter record for San Joaquin County (TR) and the second-northernmost record at any season for the species in the Central Valley (the other was in Yolo County). Another was just northeast of Bakersfield on 13 December (MMcQ) —not too far from where this species has bred in the past.

We get very few **Northern Shrikes** in the Central Valley so one at Folsom Lake in El Dorado County on 26 December was a good find (KT). Two **Cassin's Vireos** were on the Cosumnes Preserve on 15 and 16 January (JTr). A **Blue Jay** anywhere in California is a very exciting bird, so one discovered at a feeder in Chico on 26 December (T&DD) brought many birders from the region to view it through the winter. This was the third Central Valley record and the second for Butte County since the one in Chico in 1950 established the first state record. The **Winter Wren** found in November at the Cosumnes Preserve in Sacramento County was still present when seen and heard on 25 February (CCo) for only the second time despite numerous searches over the winter. This is the second Central Valley record of this eastern species from which our **Pacific Wren** was recently split. For details see CVBC Bulletin (15)1: 1-7.

**Sage Thrashers** are generally rare migrants and winter visitors in the region with most records for the foothills along the San Joaquin Valley and in desert scrub habitat on the valley floor in the Tulare Basin. This winter was a banner season for this thrasher as many were documented in unexpectedly large numbers. In Kings County, where there were relatively few recent records, one was found on Devil's Den Road on 4 December (KPa), but many

more were noted along that road and in the Panoche Hills (DSg) in February as their migration was in full swing. One was along Cord Road, San Joaquin County on 26 February (LP).

Wintering eastern warblers are always a treat to find, but one was not in an expected location as it was found in the foothills off Hwy 49 near Lake of the Pines (CrS). This was the first record of a **Northern Waterthrush** and only the second record of an eastern warbler for Nevada County. Unusual on the valley floor and especially rare in winter, a **Green-tailed Towhee** visited a Roseville feeder from 13 December through the winter (JTo) and established the first winter record in Placer County. King County's first **Clay-colored Sparrow** was at the intersection of Homeland and Poso canals on 3 December (MSy). There are several previous winter records from the San Joaquin Valley and adjacent foothills. Two more were at the viewing platform on Beckwith Road in Stanislaus County from 28 December (RB) to at least 17 February. This species had wintered at this same site in 2007. **Lark Buntings** made a splash this winter with two found in November still present on Healy Road in Merced County on 19 December (ADeM), one in Kings County along Devils' Den Road on 22 December (ADeM), another on Preston Road in Mariposa County on 30 November (DLSu), and another still present from November along Little Panoche Valley Road, Fresno County on 21 February (DSg). Up to four were along Hwy 58 west of McKittrick in Kern County from 26 December through 2 February (AS, CM, RAB).

A **Brewer's Sparrow** was at Boggs Slough in Kings County on 26 December (MSy) for one of few winter records of this species in the Central Valley. They are likely somewhat regular in desert scrub in and adjacent to the Tulare Basin. The **Black-throated Sparrow** found in the fall remained through the winter in Esparto, Yolo County. An eastern "**Red**" **Fox Sparrow** was at the Cosumnes Preserve on 3 January (IE). **Swamp Sparrow** is a rare winter visitor to California, but their numbers vary annually. One was on Venice Island on 18 December (DGY) for one of few found in San Joaquin County in over ten years. Another was at the Elkhorn Boat Ramp along the Sacramento River in Yolo County on 31 December (JCS). A **Harris's Sparrow** appeared in a Davis backyard in Sacramento County on 4 December and remained through the winter (CD) as did one found at the Cosumnes Preserve in Sacramento County on 22 January (MSt) to at least 17 February (DT).

Last winter's **Summer Tanager** at Roeding Park in Fresno returned for its second winter and was last reported on 27 February (JTz). An immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** visited a backyard in Antioch from 29 January through the winter (P&NS) and established one of few winter records for the region and Contra Costa County. A singing male **Hooded Oriole** in Rancho Cordova, Sacramento County on 18 February (TEa) was far too early to be a spring migrant, and may have overwintered locally, yet was not seen prior to that date. An amazing male **Common Redpoll** was discovered at a bird feeder

in Woodland, Yolo County on 22 February and seen again three days later (JSc, JCS, BC+). This is the third Central Valley record and one of several found this winter in California. Two **Evening Grosbeaks** visited East Lawn Cemetery in Sacramento on 15 December (CIH).

Observers: Steve Abbott (SAbb), Brian Acord, Ralph Baker, Bob Barnes (RAB), Ellen Blustein, Matt Brady (MtB), Jay Bogiatto (JBg), Brent Campos, Chris Conard (CCo), Cameron Cox (CCx), Jeff Davis (JND), Al DeMartini (Ade), Tim & Denise Devine (T&DD), Chris Dunford, Todd Easterla (TEa), Irene Engilis, Elias Elias, Dane Fagundes, Gary Fregien, John Fulton, Jim Gain (JHG), Maureen Geiger, Bingham Gibbs, Cory Gregory, Steve Hampton (SCH), Ed Harper (WEH), John Harris, Hugh Harvey, Cliff Hawley (CIH), Eugene Hunn (EHu), Tim Jenkins, Larry Jordan, Joanne Katanic, Shelly Kirn, Dan Kopp (DKO), Tony Kurz (TKz), Jim Laughlin (JLg), Albert Linkowski, Curtis Marantz, Don Marsh (DMr), Michael McQuerrey, Michael McQuerrey (MMcQ), Frances Oliver (FrO), Kathy Parker (KPa), Linda Pittman, Ron Pozzi, Harold Reeve (HMR), Krysta Rogers, Terry Ronnenberg, Deren Ross (DeR), Sal Salerno (SSa), Frank Sanderson, Paul & Nancy Schorr, Jackie Schulters (JSc), Alison Sheehey, Dan Singer (DSg), Zach Smith, Mark Stacy (MSy), John C Sterling (JCS), Maryanne Steurer (MSt), Marie Stewart (MSw), David Suddjian (DLSu), Steve Summers (SDS), Craig Swolgaard (CrS), Dan Tankersley, Kevin Thomas, Jim Tietz (JTz), Jerry Towner (JTo), John Trochet (JTr), Kent Van Vuren (KVV), Magill Weber, Bruce Webb (BWb), Gary Woods, David Yee (DGY), and Bob Yutzy.

CBRC=California Bird Records Committee; NWR=National Wildlife Refuge; WTP=Wastewater Treatment Plant.



Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*). (i.e. center foreground)  
9 March 2012. Yolo Co. Photo by Todd Easterla©