

Central Valley Region Bird Highlights: March through May 2012

*John Sterling, 26 Palm Ave, Woodland, CA 95965.
jsterling@wavecable.com*

The bird of the season was the **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** at the Toledo Pits, Tulare County from 15-27 May (RD+). Not only a first county record, it was the second accepted record for the Central Valley with the first from Buena Vista Lake, Kern County way back in 1938. The adult male **White-winged Scoter** found in winter at O'Neill Forebay in Merced County lingered until 4 March (PJM) when it was joined by an adult male **Surf Scoter**. Rare sea ducks continued at O'Neill Forebay with a **Long-tailed Duck** present 19-21 March (MS). As usual, a few migrant **Red-breasted Mergansers** were found including a male at O'Neill Forebay 3-12 March (KVV), but one at Wildhorse Golf Course in Davis on 16 March (BA) was one of few recent Yolo County records. Quite shocking was the **Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel** discovered at the pond in front of the Yolo landfill on 28 April (MH). This seabird was seen by many to establish the first record for Yolo County and the entire Central Valley. Wayward **Brown Pelicans** again made news with a juvenile over Mather Lake, Sacramento County on 22 April (TEa, FSt) and one continuing through the period at Lake Washington, Yolo County (MW). Always rare inland, a wintering **Red-throated Loon** remained on Folsom Lake in Placer and Sacramento counties until 24 March (RP) and another on O'Neill Forebay in Merced County was clearly a migrant staying from 4-11 March (PJM). A **Pacific Loon** was on O'Neill Forebay on the late date of 11 May (KVV). Also rare inland was the **Red-necked Grebe** at the Lincoln WTP on 9 May (SD) and one found in February remained until 11 May at a fish pond on Fahey Road near Santa Nella in Merced County (PJM).

Honors for second-best find of the season was the Central Valley's first **Crested Caracara** near Putah Creek in both Yolo and Solano counties on 16-17 April (MS). There have been numerous records for the coast of California in recent years and several inland records from the desert region north to Mono Lake, so it seemed only a matter of time when one would be found in our region.

A migrant **Pacific Golden-Plover** was on a pond near Utica Road in southern Kings County on 2 May (BED, Jlk)—most Central Valley records are of wintering birds in flocks of **Black-bellied Plovers**. Tehama County has little habitat for shorebirds and few if any records for most species. **Black-necked Stilts** and **American Avocets** are unusual there as a result, so eight stilts and

one avocet at Black Butte Res. on 21 April (JSL) were cause for celebration. The usual small numbers of **Solitary Sandpipers** migrated through the region with just one at Gray Lodge, Butte County on 10 April (TP). **Marbled Godwits** and **Willetts** are rare north of Yolo County, so two godwits at the Llano Seco Unit, Sacramento NWR on 12 & 19 (one bird) April (TP) were noteworthy for Butte County and seven **Willetts** at the Sacramento NWR on 14 April (KPa) was a high count for Glenn County. Four more **Willetts** at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 30 April (D&SR) was a large amount for Sacramento County. A female **Ruff** that was present in January at the Cosumnes River Preserve was seen again from 14-22 April (JTr) and a migrant was at the Yolo Bypass W.A. on 23 April (SCH).

The Sacramento WTP once again hosted a breeding pair of **Least Terns** with the first bird appearing on 21 May (CCo). A **Franklin's Gull** stopped at the Ton Tache Ponds near Alpaugh, Tulare County on 5 May (JLk); two were on 6th Ave near the Turkey Farm in Kings County on 26 April (JLk), and another graced White Slough, San Joaquin County on 28 April (JK+). Infrequent in Tehama County, an extraordinary 35 **Forster's Terns** were at the mouth of Thomas Creek on 2 May (MW). Once again Folsom Lake harbored a roosting adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** on 28 March and 3 April (BWb, GEw), this time at the Granite Bay boat ramp in Placer County. The Re-ecology landfill on Gaffery Road in sw San Joaquin County continued to attract rare gulls much later in spring than normal with counts on 20 May (DGY) of ten **Western**, two **Herring** and one **Thayer's**. Always a nice find, a first-cycle **Glaucous Gull** was found there on 31 March (LzW). A first cycle **Iceland Gull** was present there on 24 March (DGY), and the record is still in circulation with the CBRC. An adult **Iceland Gull** graced the Davis WTP on 9-17 March (TEa), but was outshone by the adult **Slaty-backed Gull** there on 9 March (TEa). Not to be outdone, the Davis WTP hosted three rare gulls on 31 March (TEa) with a first cycle **Lesser Black-backed**, a first cycle **Iceland** and a second cycle **Slaty-backed Gull**. All three species were unheard of in the Central Valley 10 years ago!

A flock of ten **Band-tailed Pigeons** at Pacheco State Park above San Luis Reservoir on 15 April (KVV) was a rare sighting for Merced County. **Northern Pygmy Owls** are exceedingly rare on the valley floor, so one on the edge of the valley at Michigan Bar Bridge on 7 April (GEw) was one of few records for Sacramento County. **Black Swifts** migrate through in small numbers but can be very difficult to see and luck often plays a large part. Three were spotted foraging over East Park Res. on 25 May (PC) with a flock of swallows for one of few Colusa County records. As usual, a few **Calliope Hummingbirds** were reported on the valley floor in Sacramento County with a male and female in Wilton on 7 April and 15 April, respectively (LP), and another lingered at Elk Grove from 15 April to 7 May (CG). The **Blue Jay** wintering in Chico was last reported on 8 May (TF). **Gray Flycatchers** are uncommon, regular spring

migrants (but exceptionally rare in fall) throughout the valley and adjacent foothills. One was at Buckley Cove, San Joaquin County on 6 May (JK). In the Central Valley, **Purple Martins** are very rare away from a few breeding sites at elevated freeways and overpasses in Sacramento. One seen at the Hwy 65 overpass over Taylor Road in Rocklin on 23 May for a first in Placer County since a pair nested at this same site since 2008 (EP). **Least Bell's Vireos** were once again found in the region with a pair at Merced NWR on 16 May (EA, JW).

The immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** found in late January in Antioch, Contra Costa County remained until 6 April (PS) but an adult male at the Tuolumne River Park in Modesto, Stanislaus County was a surprise spring vagrant on 31 May (SSa). **Green-tailed Towhees** are sometimes found on the valley floor in migration and winter but are always a rare find. One was at Upper Bidwell Park in Butte County on 16 April (JB), and a wintering bird was last seen in Roseville, Placer County on 14 April (JT). A **Lark Bunting** was on Gaffery Road in sw San Joaquin County on 31 March (DG). Exceptionally rare in migration away from suitable montane chaparral, a **Black-chinned Sparrow** was in Chico, Butte County on 27 April (SSn). **Brewer's Sparrow** is a regular migrant in small numbers in the region, and this spring one was at the Keeney Preserve near Durham, Butte County on 11 May (JCS), and one was at Rush Ranch in Solano County on 6 May (EPi). One along Waverly Road, San Joaquin County on 12 May (JRo) was only the 3rd or 4th county record. In eastern Sacramento County, two Brewer's Sparrows were on Latrobe Road on 29 April (CG), three and four were along Meiss Road on 6 May (CG) and 8-9 May (DM+), respectively, joined by a rare **Black-throated Sparrow** on the latter date (LP, KZ), and one remaining Brewer's Sparrow was there on 12 May (HO). Also in eastern Sacramento County, another **Black-throated Sparrow** was on Latrobe Road on 9 May (DJ) and a male **Lark Bunting** was on Michigan Bar Road on 13 May (GEw). Yolo County's wintering **Black-throated Sparrow** remained near Esparto until at least 11 March (WLR). The **Harris's Sparrow** at Cosumnes River Preserve in Sacramento County lingered until 3 March, the wintering Davis bird until 14 April (CD), and a migrant was present in Redding in Shasta County on 13-14 April (BMcd). **Evening Grosbeaks** made another good showing with a flock of 16 in Red Bluff on 16-17 May (MS). **Grasshopper Sparrow** status and distribution is not well understood in the region, so all reports are welcome. Four were in the Flood/Waverly Road area, San Joaquin County on 12 May (JRo).

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Abbreviations used:

WA=State Wildlife Area; WTP=Wastewater Treatment Ponds; NWR=National Wildlife Refuge; Res.=Reservoir.



Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*). 1 April, 2012. Buttonwillow, Kern County, California. Photo © John Sterling