

First Record of Common Redpoll for Placer County, California

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While working in my back yard in Lincoln, western Placer County at 09:30 on 31 December 2012, I noticed an adult male Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*) sitting on a PVC pipe about 5 m (15 ft) from me. The bird seemed unafraid, and I was able to get a good look at it. I immediately got my camera and took a few photos as the redpoll mingled with the flock of House Finches (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) at my bird feeder. I notified Ed Pandolfino about the find and he verified the identification from the photos and immediately put the word out to local birders. Within two hours of my spotting the bird, Ed and several others were watching for the bird in my back yard.

At first the redpoll typically would disappear into nearby trees or elsewhere, then dodge into the feeder to get a single black oil sunflower seed. After retrieving a seed from the feeder, he repeatedly took it to a nearby cement planter to shell and eat. Eventually, he perched on and hopped around near the feeder and was visible most of the time. Although noticeably smaller than the House Finches, he did not seem to have any trouble getting a seed when he wanted one. We watched the bird at distances of about 10-15 m (40-50 ft). He also flew to some nearby trees and fence lines when not feeding.

The bird seemed to have little fear of humans. At one point in the afternoon, Todd Easterla was standing about 20 feet from the feeder taking pictures. The redpoll flew onto Todd's head and remained there long enough to crack a seed and to allow John Sterling and me to take several pictures of the event. Given the remoteness of most of the Common Redpoll's range, it is possible that we were among the first humans encountered by this individual, and he may have considered us no more of a threat than a caribou or a muskox.

The next morning (1 January 2013), the redpoll was sitting on the empty sunflower seed feeder when I went to fill it at about 07:00, making him my first bird of the new year. The bird remained in the yard all morning as birders came to see it, getting many good looks and photos. He would sometimes spend time in the short grass or on the fence away from the feeder and the flock of House Finches. I had put up a thistle sock feeder, but the redpoll paid no attention to it. A Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) and a Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*) were both present that morning and the redpoll was not seen after 13:00 that day.

This bird provided the first Common Redpoll record for Placer County and the fourth for the Central Valley. The previous winter (2011-12) saw a remarkable and unprecedented invasion of the state by Common Redpolls, with birds found in 10 different locations ranging as far south as Julian in San Diego County (McCaskie and Garrett 2012, Pandolfino et al. 2012). Prior to that winter, redpolls had never been found south of Fresno in the state (Hamilton et al. 2007). In winter 2012-2013, small flocks of Common Redpolls were found in the northeastern portion of California, but the Placer redpoll was the southernmost record in the state this season.

LITERATURE CITED

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Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*). 31 December 2012. Lincoln, Placer County, California. Photo © John York