

First record of Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*) for Sutter County, California

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The Green-tailed Towhee in northern California typically is observed breeding in montane chaparral and shrubby habitats on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada, the northern coastal ranges and, less commonly, the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada; small numbers winter in southern California (Zeiner et al. 1990). It is rarely detected, as a spring and fall migrant and occasional winter visitor, in the Central Valley. Although there are a few records for the Central Valley floor in adjacent counties (e. g., Butte, Sacramento, Yolo and Yuba), this note documents the first known record of Green-tailed Towhee for Sutter County.

The Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District is presently working collaboratively with the University of California, Davis, to investigate



Figure 1. Green-tailed Towhee mist-netted at Old River Slough, Sutter Co.,
3 September 1997.

Photo by John Hileman

the presence of two enzootic viruses, western equine encephalitis and St. Louis encephalitis, associated with wild bird populations and occasionally transmitted to other vertebrates, including humans, by mosquitoes. The investigation involves capturing, banding, and taking blood samples from wild birds, using mist nets at a number of riparian sites near the Sacramento River.

On the warm, sunny morning of 3 September 1997, while banding on the Edson Ranch adjacent to Old River Slough, we captured a Green-tailed Towhee in a mist net positioned near the oxbow within some low-growing willows. The towhee was found in the bottom tier of the net. Nearby habitat is a mixed woodland of valley oaks, cottonwoods and willows. The surrounding landscape consists of walnut orchards and row crops. The vegetation around the shallow pond is relatively dense. This location is about 4 mi. southeast of the nearest town, Knight's Landing in adjacent Yolo County.

The bird was in bright, fresh basic plumage showing no signs of molt. No subcutaneous fat was observed in the furculum or under the wing. Measurements taken included: culmen - 8.5 mm; exposed culmen - 13.5 mm; wing chord - 77.5 mm; crown patch - 24 mm; and tarsus - 23.5 mm. The bird weighed 34 g. The skull was fully ossified. Wing chord length was within the range for either sex, but the very bright, extensive crown (Pyle 1997) and overall robust size suggested a possible male. There was no evidence of a brood patch or cloacal protuberance. The bird was banded and had its blood sampled, then was photographed (Fig. 1) and released. The blood sample from the towhee tested negative for virus. We did not see or recapture the bird on two subsequent visits to this site in October.

LITERATURE CITED

Pyle, P. 1997. Identification Guide to North American Birds. Part I (Columbidae to Ploceidae). Slate Creek Press. Bolinas, CA.

Zeiner, D. C., W. F. Laudenslayer, Jr., K. E. Mayer, and M. White (editors). 1990. California's Wildlife. Volume II. Birds. California State Wildlife Habitat Relationships System, California Department of Fish and Game. Sacramento, CA.