

1998 (Fourth) Report of the Sacramento Bird Records Committee

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The Sacramento Bird Records Committee (SBRC) reviews records of unusual birds reported within the boundaries described by the *Checklist of the Birds of the Sacramento Area* (Sacramento Audubon Society 1993; hereafter referred to as the *Checklist*). Current members of the SBRC are Ted Beedy, Bruce Deuel, Ed Greaves, Ed Harper, Jeri Langham, Tim Manolis (chair), John Trochet, and David Yee. This is the second SBRC report to be published in the *CVBC Bulletin* (see Manolis 1998).

Since the last SBRC report, 36 records have been reviewed. This represents a rather slow pace that I hope can be increased in 1999. Of the records reviewed in the past year, 29 (80%) were accepted, 1 (3%) not accepted, and 6 (17%) held over for recirculation because of split votes. Votes of 8-0 or 7-1 constitute acceptance; votes of 6-2, 5-3, or 4-4 trigger recirculation; votes of 3-5 or less constitute non-acceptance. The information in parentheses for each record listed below includes: the record number, indicating when the record was received (e. g., number 24-93 was the twenty-fourth record received in 1993); for accepted records, the initials of the *observer(s) submitting documentation* (i.e., not necessarily the discoverer[s] of the bird); and comments on supporting documentation other than a written description (e.g., photos, tape recordings, etc.).

Since the publication of the 1993 *Checklist*, the SBRC has decided no longer to review records of the following species, unless they are reported aseasonally (e.g., a winter report of Short-billed Dowitcher should still be documented): Blue-winged Teal, Greater Scaup, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Short-billed Dowitcher, Glaucous Gull, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Townsend's Solitaire, Dusky Flycatcher, Gray Flycatcher, Hammond's Flycatcher, Grasshopper Sparrow. However, records of these species from before 1996 may still be submitted and will be reviewed.

REPORTS ACCEPTED

Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) - One (29-93, JRa) was seen at Colusa National Wildlife Refuge, Colusa Co., 26 August 1993.

This species was not even mentioned on the 1993 *Checklist*, although it had been on some previous versions of the list, because all prior records lacked documentation for the SBRC to evaluate. However, it has become apparent from a number of reports from throughout the *Checklist* area since 1993 (e.g., see Jones et al. 1998) that Least Bittern is an established part of the local avifauna (although regrettably few of these recent reports have been adequately

documented to the SBRC). The submission of this record included the comment that "Least Bitterns are reported to be nesting at Sutter Refuge and Delevan Refuge as well, by USFWS staff." Whether the recent increase in records is due to a real population increase, instead of an artifact of increased observer awareness and coverage, is hard to tell because of the species' elusive nature. The SBRC continues to welcome documented reports of Least Bitterns, even reports that are years old.

American Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*) - One (36-94, TM) was seen at the SE corner of the intersection of Dillard Road and Highway 99, 5 mi. S of Elk Grove, Sacramento Co., 29 October 1994.

This is the first record accepted by the SBRC for Sacramento County since the taxonomic split of "Lesser Golden-Plover" into two species. Prior records of Golden-Plovers for the county were either accepted as Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) or lacked documentation needed to determine the species seen.

Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) - Three records were accepted: One (7-88, LM) seen at Discovery Park, Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 6 February - 20 March, 1988; one (9-93, JH, RK) about 5 mi. N of Ione, Amador Co., 15 February 1993; one (10-93, CB) near Bannister Park, Carmichael, Sacramento Co., 13 February 1993 (and reportedly for some weeks prior).

These owls were all found at daytime roosts. Record 7-88 was seen and photographed by many observers during its extended stay, but only one description was submitted to the SBRC! This tiny owl is easily overlooked but is probably of regular winter occurrence in the area, although, as the two reported in 1993 suggest, it may be more numerous in some years than in others. Reports of this species are no longer reviewed by the SBRC.

Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*) - Two reports of migrating flocks were accepted: 6 birds (24-93, TM) seen over the Spenceville Wildlife Area, in both Yuba and Nevada cos., 28 May 1993; and 5 birds (12-97, JTr) over the Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento Co., 18 May 1996.

These records suggest that spring migrants may appear unexpectedly just about anywhere in the area. Both involved brief observations of fast-moving, loosely-knit flocks during unsettled weather conditions.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) - Three reports were accepted: One (35-93, GE, TM) in William Land Park, Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 18-22 December 1993; one (29-94, JL) along the American River Parkway near Howe Avenue, Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 3 December 1993; and one (9-95, TM) in the Arden Park area, Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 29-30 December 1994 and (presumably the same bird) 24 March 1995.

There were more local reports of this species than usual in the winter of 1993-94, records 35-93 and 29-94 being the first of these accepted by the SBRC (others are still under review).

Red-naped Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) - One (18-93,EH) was seen near American River College, Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 27-28 March 1993.

Red-naped x Red-breasted Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis* x *ruber*) - Although hybrids are normally not reviewed by the SBRC, one report (10-94, TM) of an apparent hybrid seen at Gibson Ranch County Park, Sacramento Co., 9-18 March 1994, was circulated with a packet containing a number of other sapsucker records (e.g., see above). The intent of circulating this record was to better ascertain the SBRC members' views on local status and identification of species within the *Sphyrapicus* complex. The committee unanimously agreed that a Red-naped x Red-breasted cross best accounted for the features shown by this bird.

Clark's Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*) - Two reports for the autumn of 1996 were accepted: One (41-96, JTr, GE [photos], TM) present in North Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 5-11 November 1996 (and reportedly present for a few days prior); one (47-96, DS, SH) seen in Davis, Yolo Co., 30 November 1996.

These records were part of a major incursion of this and other boreal species to the lowlands of California in the autumn of 1996 (Roberson et al. 1997, McCaskie 1997). They were the first reports of this species in the Sacramento area since the 1960s, and record 47-96 is the first for Yolo County. Both birds were found feeding on the large cones of ornamental pines in residential areas. It is possible that the two reports refer to the same bird, but minor differences in the descriptions received suggest otherwise. An undocumented report from Davis for 8 December 1996 may have involved the one seen in November or perhaps a third bird.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee (*Poecile rufescens*) - Two reports were accepted: One (26-95, TM) in Davis, Yolo Co., 26 October 1994 (first reported on 23 October [by Joan Humphrey] and into November [with some reports of up to 3 birds involved], but no documentation of these sightings were submitted to the SBRC); one (16-95, JTr) at C. M. Goethe Park, the American River Parkway, Rancho Cordova, Sacramento Co., 30 November 1994.

These records represent a mini-invasion of the Central Valley floor, for which there are very few reports. Of a handful of previous records for Yolo County, most are from the Berryessa Hills (Beedy 1993; pers. comm.). Record 16-95 is the first for Sacramento County.

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) - A female (21-94, DAH) was seen at Lake Solano County Park, Solano Co., 30 June 1994.

Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*) - Four reports were accepted: One (8-94, AE) at the Woodbridge Ecological Preserve, San Joaquin Co., 19

December 1993; one (13-95, JTr) at the Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento Co., 27 October 1994; one (59-95, JTr, JL) at the Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento Co., 3 December 1995-7 January 1996; and one (3-96, JL) at the Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento Co., 21 December 1995.

Records 59-95 and 3-96 were of birds seen in different parts of the preserve, and described as different by the observer (JL) who saw both.

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) - One (54-95, SH, EG [photos]) seen in Solano Park, Davis, Yolo Co., 27 October-2 November 1995, was only the second record accepted for Yolo County and the area, the first being of a bird found dead in Woodland in 1989.

Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*) - One (45-95, TM, BW [photos]) was seen at the Woodland Sugar Ponds, Woodland, Yolo Co., 10 October 1995.

A first record for Yolo County and the Sacramento Valley, this record was discussed by Manolis and Webb (1998).

Cassin's Finch (*Carpodacus cassinii*) - Three records were accepted: Two (26-97, JTr) seen in North Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 11 November 1996; one (5-97, LE [photos]) in Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 19 January-10 February (at least) 1997; and one (8-97, JH, TM) in Davis, Yolo Co., 5 February 1997 (originally reported sometime before that date and seen for some time into February thereafter).

Records 5-97 and 8-97 involved males coming to backyard feeders for a number of weeks, but the exact time intervals of their visits were not reported. The winter of 1996-97 was an exceptional one for lowland reports of this species in California (see references cited under Clark's Nutcracker, above).

Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) - Three reports were accepted: A flock of five (23-96, RM) seen in Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 10 March 1985; A flock of 15 (46-96, DS) seen in Davis, Yolo Co., 30 November 1996; and up to 30 (7-97, SH) at the University of California, Davis, Arboretum, Davis, Yolo Co., 3 November 1996-19 January 1997 (and presumably some of the same birds at the nearby Raptor Center, Solano Co., 15 February 1997).

Flocks of crossbills were rather widely reported in the Davis area in the fall of 1996 and through the following winter, mirroring a statewide trend (see references cited under Clark's Nutcracker, above). The reports from Davis suggested that more than one flock was involved, but it was difficult to know for sure how much overlap existed, if any, between the birds involved in records 46-96 and 7-97. The winter of 1984-85 was also an invasion year for Red Crossbills into the lowlands of California (Campbell and Bailey 1985, McCaskie 1985), including the Sacramento area (pers. obs.). The birds seen in 1985 (record 23-96) were described as having "bills . . . quite small for crossbills," but a sketch of one of the birds reported in record 7-97 shows a moderately heavy bill.

REPORTS NOT ACCEPTED

Cassin's Finch - A flock of 7-8 (12-93) was reported in Sacramento, Sacramento Co., 14 March 1993.

In general, the committee felt the description was too skimpy to be conclusive.

The SBRC sincerely thanks all those who have submitted reports, including the following observers who submitted reports evaluated herein: Carla Barbaro, Leo Edson, Andrew Engilis, Jr., Gil Ewing, Ed Greaves, Steve Hampton, Ed Harper, Jack Hiehle, David A. Holway, Joan Humphrey, Ron Kurtz, Jeri Langham, Tim Manolis, Ralph McCormick, Louise McCullough, John Ranlett, Daniel Stoebel, John Trochet, Bruce Webb, and David Yee.

Please send reports for SBRC review to the author, at the address provided at the beginning of this article.

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