

A Black Turnstone in San Joaquin County

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On 2 August 2002, Waldo Holt and I observed an adult, breeding-plumaged Black Turnstone (*Arenaria melanocephala*) at the Stockton sewage ponds, San Joaquin County. It was a hot sunny afternoon with very little wind. The turnstone was at the far northeast corner of the huge complex along the levee roads, a favored spot for shorebirds. It was in the company of Black-necked Stilts (*Himantopus mexicanus*), California Gulls (*Larus californicus*), European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and Brewer's Blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*). The bird allowed close unobstructed views over a 30-minute period at distances as close as 15 m, and was photographed (Figure 1).

An unmistakable looking shorebird, the entire plumage was bold black and white. The short black bill was slightly upturned. The upperparts, including the wings, were dark black except for a white supercilium that extended across the forehead, white flecking in the face, crown and scapular areas, and a bold white spot in the lore area. The throat area was solid black that extended into the upper breast area as a bib. At mid-breast, black and white streaking was prominent to the belly area. The remaining portions of the underparts were white except for a few black streaks in the vent area. In flight the bold flashes of black and white were created by the prominent white stripe up the lower back, extensive white to the base of the primaries and secondaries, white shoulder patches, black subterminal band on a white tail, and clean white underwings. The legs were dusky with a hint of flesh tones. The bird called several times, a high chattering "krkrkrkrkr." The only real problematic contenders are Surfbird (*Aphriza virgata*) and Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), which, among other notable field marks, have bright yellowish or orangish legs.

The Black Turnstone is a species restricted to western North America. It breeds in coastal Alaska and winters coastally from se. Alaska to s. Baja California and central Sonora (AOU 1983). During migration it is casual to strictly accidental in the interior, unlike the widespread Ruddy Turnstone, which migrates regularly throughout the interior of the continent.

In the Central Valley there appear to be but three previously published records: near Volta, Merced County, 7 May 1970 (Baldrige et al. 1970, McCaskie et al. 1988); near Woodland, Yolo County, 12 May 1977 (Winter and Morlan 1977); and up to two at these same Stockton sewage ponds, 18-20 August 1981 (Evens et al. 1981). Recent unpublished reports from the southern San Joaquin Valley include: one at Tulare Lake Drainage District's Hacienda Evaporation Basin, Kings County, 8 August 1999, and what was believed to be the same individual at the nearby Tulare Lake Drainage District's Hacienda South Evaporation Ponds, Kings/Kern Counties, 26

September 1999; one at Lemoore Naval Station, Kings County, 31 August 2000; and one near Kettleman City, Kings County, 5 July 2001 (R. Hansen, pers. comm.).

Shortly after this sighting, another Black Turnstone was reported, without documentation, near the Llano Seco National Wildlife Refuge, Butte County, 15 August 2002 (N. California Bird Box).

LITERATURE CITED

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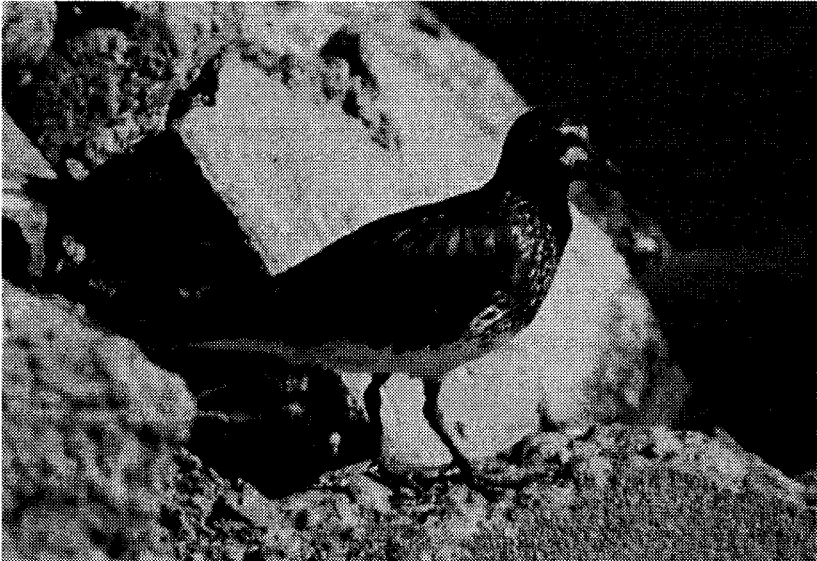


Figure 1. Black Turnstone (*Arenaria melanocephala*) at the Stockton Sewage Ponds, San Joaquin County, on 2 August 2002.

photo by David Yee