

Central Valley Bird Highlights: March through May 2003

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WATERBIRDS

A **Red-necked Grebe** on the Thermalito Afterbay, Butte County, on 5 April (JSL, LC) was the only report this spring; the location is one where this normally coastal winterer has been seen in the past. This was a great spring for **Least Bitterns** in the Central Valley as they were widely reported from areas where there have been very few previous records. One calling bird was at an undisclosed location in Stanislaus County on 18 May (JG); another at the end of Road 30 for Yolo County's third record on 8 May (MH) and 11 May (JK), with 2-3 there through at least mid-July; and in Merced County, one was singing along Gun Club Road on 1 May (FT) with a second one on 5 May (PM), another was along Henry Miller Road on 20 April (L&CL), and another was at Merced National Wildlife Refuge from 15 March on (GP, JG, DB, JSL +).

Four **White-faced Ibis** flying along Interstate 5 in southern Tehama County on 12 May (BD) were in an area where some were found last year. This species is still very rare in that county despite population increases further to the south. An astonishing discovery was of a female **Hooded Merganser** with a brood of six ducklings on 17 May (CH) in the Del Webb Sun City Lincoln Hills development in lowland Placer County for a first Central Valley breeding record. A female **Red-breasted Merganser** was at Turlock Lake on 30 March and 18 May (SG) in Stanislaus County and a male was at Avocado Lake along the Kings River, Fresno County, on 25 March (JD).

A small marsh near Camp Far West in Placer County was found to have at least three **Black Rails*** on 15 April (JCS, TE, BW). This was the first confirmed record for the county, but is fairly close to known sites in Yuba County. A **Pacific Golden-Plover** was at the Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge in Butte County on 5 April (JSL, LC) where it is rare. An **American Golden-Plover** was a good find at the Modesto Sewage Ponds, Stanislaus County, where **Pacific Golden-Plovers** are regularly seen, on 21 April (JG) and 30 April (JSL). **Snowy Plovers** are rare in the Central Valley away from breeding locations in the southern San Joaquin Valley, so a few sightings made news: One along Riosa Road in Placer County on 30 April (DS) and 1 May (JCS); seven at the Modesto Sewage Ponds on 21 April (JG) with four there on 30 April (JSL) and five on 1 May (KR) that was joined by a **Sanderling**; one at the O'Neill Forebay on 14 April (KVV) in Merced County; and one on 21 April (JSL) at the Lodi Sewage Ponds in San Joaquin County where two were found later on 5 May (KM). A **Solitary Sandpiper** at the

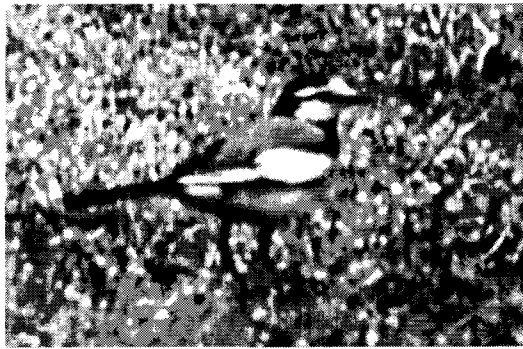
Colusa National Wildlife Refuge on 8 May (JLe) in Colusa County, one at the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge on 23 April (RH) in Glenn County, one and along Bear Butte Road on 23 April (RH) in Tehama County were all in counties that have few records of this species. Another was near Lincoln on 30 April (EP) in Placer County, where records of this species have added up quickly during the past three years. Seven **Willetts** at the Lincoln Sewage Ponds on 28 April (JSL) was one a few records for lowland Placer County. A flock of 18 **Marbled Godwits** at Camp Far West Reservoir on 25 April (TM) and a single godwit in the hunt club marsh northeast of the corner of Ramirez and Fruitland Roads on 6 May (EP) were the first and second records for Yuba County. Another county first was a flock of twenty-nine **Marbled Godwits** joined by a rare **Snowy Plover** at the Redding Sewage Ponds, Shasta County, on 29 April (BD), and mingled with Shasta's first **Red Knot** found previously on 27 April (RB & SL). Two flocks of **Marbled Godwits** (32 and 28 birds) near Lincoln on 3 May (EP, SG, CH) were large numbers for Placer County where they have been relatively rare. A single **Marbled Godwit** with a **Willet** at the Patterson Sewage Ponds on 4 May (SG) was in Stanislaus County where there are fewer records than in neighboring counties. Two **Sanderlings** at the Madera Sewage Ponds on 30 May (JSL) were apparently the first record for Madera County.

One of the season's best finds was the **Curlew Sandpiper** at Merced National Wildlife Refuge on 25 May (AJ) and seen again on 26 May (KVV) for the first Merced County record and one of very few for the Central Valley of this Eurasian species. It was joined by a **Stilt Sandpiper** which may have been the same individual as one found on 20 April (PM). Rare during spring in California, a **Pectoral Sandpiper** along Brewer Road in southeastern Sutter County on 5 May (JCS) was that county's first spring record (*vide* BD). A **Ruff** at the Merced National Wildlife Refuge on 26 February (BB) and 8 March (JG) was probably wintering in the area; it was joined by locally-rare, first-year **Thayer's** and **Glaucous-winged Gulls**. Both of these gull species are somewhat regular further west in the O'Neill Forebay region of Merced County. The only **Glaucous Gull** found this winter in Yolo County was not found until the "spring" and was at the Yolo County Landfill on 3 March (JK) where this rare species is found somewhat regularly. A **Franklin's Gull** briefly landed at the Ceres Sewage Ponds on 18 May (SG) in Stanislaus County where it averages about one report per year (*vide* JG).

LANDBIRDS

Several hundred **Vaux's Swifts** seen coming to roost at the University of California, Davis Medical Center in Sacramento during the evening of 4 May (CC) was a rare sighting of a phenomenon witnessed primarily along the coast and in the Los Angeles region (see the article about this roost elsewhere in this issue). An **Eastern Phoebe*** found on 16 May (JLx) along Gladding Road one half mile north of Manzanita Road in Placer County will

be that county's first record if accepted by the Sacramento Bird Records Committee. There are only a handful of spring records for California. A well-



Black-backed Wagtail near Woodlake, Tulare County, 26 April 2003.

photo © Jeff Wheaton

Siberian species, pending review by the California Bird Records Committee.

Rare-but-regular spring migrants, a **Brewer's Sparrow** was at the Yolo Basin Wildlife Area on 10 May (BG) and two were at Yosemite Lake on 4 May (PM) near the city of Merced. A **Clay-colored Sparrow*** found on

about 10 April was still present at least through 22 April (J&LH, MP, JK) near Winters in Solano County. There are very few spring records for this species in California. A singing **Grasshopper Sparrow** along Black Butte Road in southern Tehama County on 27 May (JCS) was a fourth county record. Another found on 22 March (MF) near San Luis Reservoir in Merced County was the earliest report for this spring. Sutter County's overdue first record of **Great-tailed Grackle** was established on 23 May (JCS) with two seen flying southwest from the intersection of County Line Road and Riosa Road. Others were found in Shasta County, one in Redding on 12 May (BY) and seven males and one female at the nearby Lema Ranch on 3 May (LS).

* Pending endorsement by the Sacramento Bird Records Committee

Observers: Dennis Braddy, Bev Brock, Ray Bruun, Luke Cole, Chris Conard, Jeff Davis, Bruce Deuel, Todd Easterla, Mike Feighner, Jim Gain, Steve Glover, Bill Grenfell, Cliff Hawley, Rob Hewitt, Marcel Holyoak, John & Liz Honeysett, Al Jaramillo, Jon King, John Lewis (Jle), Les & Cindy Lieurance, Jim Lomax (JLx), Stephen Long, John S. Luther (JSL), Tim Manolis, Peter Metropulos, Kurt Mize, Ed Pandolfino, Michael Perrone, Garry Potter, Karen Rapp, Don Schmoltdt, Larry Seimens, John C. Sterling (JCS), Francis Toldi, Kent Van Vuren, Jeff and Jeannie Wheaton, Bruce Webb and Bob Yutzy.