

Central Valley Bird Highlights: August through November 2003

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WATERBIRDS

A **Pacific Loon** was on San Luis Reservoir, Merced County, on 17 November (KVV), where rare but regular. A **Horned Grebe** at the Fresno Sewage Ponds on 14 November (JD) and another at the Davis Wetlands, Yolo County, on 9 November (SH) were treats for those locations. **Least Bitterns** found during the summer at the end 30 in Yolo County were present until at least 11 August.

A female **Barrow's Goldeneye** at the Ione Sewage Ponds, Amador County, on 16 November (SG) was at a traditional location for this locally rare species. However, 2-4 more at a new site at the Valley Springs Sewage Ponds from November through the winter (JLo, JLu, JS+) made for only the eleventh Calaveras County record. A **Long-tailed Duck** was at the Tracy Sewage Ponds, San Joaquin County, in November. A female **Red-breasted Merganser** was found at Salt Springs Valley Reservoir, Calaveras County, on 21 November (SG). Another was at Kutras Lake in Redding, Shasta County, on 10 November (BD, and two more were found at the O'Neil Forebay, Merced County on 17 November (KVV) and were joined by a **Surf Scoter** on 20 November (PM). Other scoters made headlines in Shasta County with three **White-winged Scoters** and one **Surf Scoter** at the Redding Sewage Ponds on 10 November (RS); two (the same?) **White-winged Scoters** were seen at nearby Kutras Lake on 19 November (BD+).

An **American Golden-Plover** was at the Merced National Wildlife Refuge on 20 November (PM) — a very late date for this rare migrant. Another was at the Davis Wetlands, Yolo County, on 10 October (JK). All reports should include documentation sent to the California Bird Records Committee, as it is now a review species. The highest count of **Mountain Plovers** for the fall was of a flock of 209 on Flannery Road south of Dixon, Solano County, on 22 November (LE). In Yolo County, locally rare **Snowy Plovers** were at the Davis Wetlands on 19 August (SH) and at the Vic Fazio Wildlife Area on 21 August (JS). Two **Black-necked Stilts** at Salt Springs Reservoir, Calaveras County, on 16 November (SG) and another at Comanche Reservoir, Amador County, on 17 August (SG) were at foothill locations where they are locally rare. A **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Salt Springs Reservoir on 27 October (EP, JLo) was one of few recorded in Calaveras County. A **Solitary Sandpiper** or two were at the Redding Sewage Ponds in Shasta County on 1, 3, 5, and 19 September (TE, BD, JS, RB+). A locally rare **Willet** was at the Lincoln Sewage Ponds, Placer County, on 5 August (DC). Three **Willetts** at the Lodi Sewage Ponds, San Joaquin County, on 9-10 August

(DY, FO) were at a location where they are somewhat regular. A **Marbled Godwit** in the Natomas area of northern Sacramento County on 23 November (EP) was not only fairly rare for that location but was also exceptionally late. A flock of 37 at the Davis Wetlands on 16 August (JK, MP) was the high count for **Marbled Godwit** in Yolo County this fall. A rare inland **Ruddy Turnstone** was found in an irrigated plowed field off Utica Avenue in southern Kings County on 18 October (JLu, SG, EP, JS) and another was at the Davis Wetlands on 30 August (JK, RA). A very late **Baird's Sandpiper** was at the Lodi Sewage Ponds, San Joaquin County, on 22 October (DY). **Baird's Sandpipers** seen on more typical dates included several where there are still few county records including one on Brewer Road, Placer County, on 19 August (BW, SA; Figure 1), one near Colusa National Wildlife Refuge in Colusa County on 1 and 4 September (JS, JLu, JLo), two at the Chowchilla Sewage Ponds, Madera County, on 1 September (KVV), one at the Redding Sewage Ponds, Shasta County, on 1-5 September (TE, BD, JS+), one at the Lincoln Sewage Ponds on 4 September (SA), two at the north end of Black Butte Reservoir, Tehama County, on 5 and 10 September (BD, JLo), at the Bufferlands in Sacramento County on 5 September (CC), at Leaky Acres in Fresno County on 7 September (JD), at the Lost Slough wetlands in Sacramento County on 7 September (CC) and two at the Madera Sewage Ponds, Madera County, on 26 September (JLu, JLo). The following **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were reported: one at the Fresno Sewage Ponds on 12 August (JD), at Los Banos Wildlife Area, Merced County, on 18 August (JG), Redding Sewage Ponds on 1-3 September (TE+), and, in Yolo County, one at Vic Fazio Wildlife Area on 21 August (JS), from three to perhaps seven at the Davis Wetlands from 4 August to 14 September (JK), with another at the Woodland Sewage Ponds on 29 August (JK). A **Semipalmated Sandpiper*** along Hwy 20 near Colusa National Wildlife Refuge on 31 August (SG) and 1-4 September (JS, JLu, JLo) was a first for Colusa County. Two **Ruffs*** at the Vic Fazio Wildlife Area on 8 November+



Figure 1.
Baird's Sandpiper
(*Calidris bairdii*)
along Brewer
Road, Placer Co.,
19 August 2004.

digiscoped
photo by
Steve Abbott

(LL, SA) were at a location where this rare Eurasian shorebird has wintered in previous years. Another Yolo County **Ruff*** was at the North Pond in Davis from 6-13 September (SH+). A **Ruff** near Willows in Glenn County on 7 September (JLu) was one of few records for that county.

An adult **Long-tailed Jaeger** on Shasta Lake from 30 August to 7 September (TS, FS+) was a first record for Shasta County. One of the highlights of the year was the well-documented, first-year **Lesser Black-backed Gull*** below Nimbus Dam along the American River in Sacramento County from 24 November on (SNGH+). This is the first Central Valley record of this Eurasian species. Later that same day, a first-winter **Franklin's Gull** was discovered at the Tracy Sewage Ponds, San Joaquin County, and seen through the end of November (KR). Another **Franklin's Gull** was at Salt Springs Valley Reservoir on 27 September (JS) for a first Calaveras County record. Adult **Western Gulls** at San Luis Reservoir in Merced County on 17 November (KVV), at the Gristmill Access along the American River Parkway, Sacramento County, on 13 November (JML), at Nimbus Fish Hatchery, Sacramento County, on 27 November (BW+) and at the Davis Wetlands, Yolo County, from 20 October on (EH) were in areas where there have been several records in recent winters. Kutras Lake in Redding, Shasta County, is well known for its late fall/winter collection of gulls, and rare to uncommon species found there on 19 November (BD) included: one **Mew**, one **Thayer's**, four **Glaucous-wingeds** and one probable hybrid adult **Western X Glaucous-winged**. The only **Sabine's Gull*** reported this fall was one with three **Common Terns*** at Folsom Lake off Beale's Point in Placer County on 26 September (BW). Three **Common Terns** at the southern end of Black Butte Reservoir, in Glenn County on 5 September (JS) constituted one of few records for Glenn County.

LANDBIRDS

A **Common Nighthawk*** at the Yolo Bypass on 19 August (DF) was one of few records for Yolo County. This species nests locally around the Sacramento Valley, but is rarely seen in migration. An immature male **Costa's Hummingbird*** was at the Grassland Preserve, Yolo County, on 2 October (JS). In Tar Canyon, Kings County, a few locally-rare species were found on 18 October (JLu, SG, EP, JS) with 20+ **Yellow-billed Magpies**, one **Lewis' Woodpecker**, and some **Band-tailed Pigeons**. Two **Pinyon Jays** in Tar Canyon on 6 October (JLo) established a first county record and one of several reports in the central coast range this fall.

A rare migrant **Purple Martin** was at the Ione Sewage Ponds on 17 August (SG). A **Winter Wren** at the Wood Duck Ponds in Yolo County on 9 August (RA) was an early record for the county. A **Townsend's Solitaire** on a private ranch in eastern Sacramento County on 29 November (JT) was the only one reported from the valley floor this fall. A **Brown Thrasher*** at Woodbridge Park in Lodi on 31 October (JSc) was discovered by PRBO

bird-banders and was later seen through the winter by many for only the second San Joaquin County record (the first was in 1954). **Phainopeplas** were found throughout the fall/winter at Reading Island (a Bureau of Land Management site) in southern Shasta County, where locally rare (RS, BY+).

As usual, a few vagrant eastern warblers were found scattered at a few key Central Valley locations this fall. A **Tennessee Warbler*** at the Grasslands Park, Yolo County, on October 3 (SH) was refound on the 8 October (JK, JS+). Babel Slough in southeastern Yolo County once again produced with a **Chestnut-sided Warbler*** from 6-9 September (RA+). The Cosumnes River Preserve in Sacramento County had its usual luck with a **Magnolia Warbler*** on 30 September (JT), a **Blackpoll Warbler*** from 30 September (BW, JT, EH, JDz) to 3 October (JT, JS), a very rare **Bay-breasted Warbler*** also on 30 September (JT+), and a very early **Northern Water-thrush*** on 15 August (JT). Other **Blackpoll Warbler** sightings included: one near Davis, Yolo County, on 20 September (MH), one at the Moen Ranch on 7 October (GP+) for a first record for Madera County, another in Del Puerto Canyon on 21 September (JLo, JG, HR) for a first for Stanislaus County and finally, yet another at the O'Neill Forebay, Merced County, on 28 September (KVV). Also at the O'Neill Forebay this fall were a **Black-and-white Warbler** and a very rare **Bell's Vireo** on 12 September (JLu).

An extraordinary three **Green-tailed Towhees*** were found in southeastern Yolo County with singles at the Wood Duck Ponds on 6-9 September (RA+) and at Babel Slough on 10-11 September (MG, SH) and 28 September (JK). A **Clay-colored Sparrow** 7.2 and 8.3 miles up Del Puerto Canyon Road on 14 October (MR) and 15 October (JLu), respectively, was a first for Stanislaus County. Another **Clay-colored Sparrow*** was at the Woodland Sewage Ponds, Yolo County, on 2 October (JS). A **Brewer's Sparrow*** was at the Bufferlands in Sacramento County on 12 September (CC). The Central Valley's northernmost **Great-tailed Grackle** was a female at the Lema Ranch Park in Redding, Shasta County, from 13 October on (RM).

* Pending endorsement by the Sacramento Bird Records Committee

I greatly appreciate the summaries of bird sightings generously provided by Chris Conard and Steve Hampton. Additional Observers: Steve Abbott, Roger Adamson, Ray Bruun, Dennis Cavallo, Jim Danzenbaker, Jeff Davis, Bruce Deuel, Todd Easterla, Leo Edson, David Feliz, Jim Gain, Maureen Geiger, Steve Glover, Ed Harper, Cliff Hawley, Marcel Holyoak, Steve N.G. Howell, Jon King, Jeri M. Langham (JML), Les Lieurance, Jim Lomax (JLo), John Luther (JLu), Peter Metropulos, Red Modeen, Frances Oliver, Ed Pandolfino, Michael Perrone, Gary Potter, Harold Reeve, Kathy Robertson, Mike Rogers, Rob Santry, John Schick (JSc), John Sterling, Fritz Steurer, Tim Steurer, John Trochet, Kent Van Vuren, Bruce Webb, David Yee and Bob Yutzky.

Notes

A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher nesting attempt in Kern County—On 14 May 2000 Dean DiThomaso noticed a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) in the vicinity of South Belridge, Kern County, on the west side of the southern San Joaquin Valley. The bird, presumably a female due to the equal tail length to body length ratio, was observed flycatching from a telephone wire, a fence, and from sprinkler heads in an adjacent cotton field (see Figure 1).

On 31 May I observed the bird constructing a nest on a transformer high up on a telephone pole adjacent to the cotton field. It appeared to have paired up with a Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) and, although there was no observations of mating on that date or subsequently, Mark Chichester observed the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher sitting on the nest on 6 June.

No young birds were ever detected and the last known observation of this bird occurred on 9 July when the bird was seen at (but not sitting on) the nest (*vide* Joe Morlan). — *John Wilson, 1425 Alta Vista Drive Bakersfield, California 93305.*



Figure 1. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) in the company of a Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) near South Belridge, Kern County, on 31 May 2000.

photo by John Wilson