

Central Valley Bird Highlights: December 2003 through February 2004

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WATERBIRDS

A **Pacific Loon** on the Calaveras County side of Camanche Reservoir on 24 January (TE) was an overdue first county record. A **Cattle Egret** along Wise Road was barely within the Placer County line for only the third or fourth county record in late December (TE) and five were found there on 31 December (EP). A flock of 14 **White-faced Ibis** flying north of Hwy 12 in western Calaveras County on 4 January (DW) was the sixth record for the county. An immature **Tundra Swan** near Ione in Amador County on 2 January (FS) was only the second county record and was thought for a few days to be an immature Trumpeter Swan. A bunch of us learned a great deal about swan identification—basically don't bother with silent immatures! Also at that site were **Cackling Geese** with the **Canada Geese** and a **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** (first Amador record) on 3 January (JS). Another **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** on 19 January (EH) was in the Yolo Bypass. About 500 **Blue-winged Teal** were counted at Los Banos Wildlife Area by state biologists on 27 December and 93 were counted on the Los Banos CBC on 29 December. These are not only extremely high counts for Merced County but for the entire state. A male **Tufted Duck** along with **Barrow's Goldeneye** and **Greater Scaup** were along West Butte Road in Sutter County on 30 December (BW). These are all rare in Sutter County and the Tufted Duck was only the second county record. Another male **Tufted Duck** at San Luis NWR from 13 February (LY) was perhaps the first Merced County record away from the O'Neill Forebay. Another **Tufted Duck** in the Yolo Bypass on 18 January (SA) was the third record for Yolo County. The Calaveras County **Barrow's Goldeneyes** found in November at the Valley Springs sewage ponds were still present through the end of February (CM). A **Long-tailed Duck** at the Winters sewage ponds on 15 December was the third record for Yolo County (CBC). Three **Red-breasted Mergansers** along the Sacramento River in Redding on 31 January (AD+) was a high count for Shasta County and the Central Valley. Another was in Fresno on 11-12 January (JD). A rare wintering **Sanderling** was at the Modesto Sewage Pond, Stanislaus County from 19-22 December (JG) and another **Sanderling** along with two **Snowy Plovers** were at the Los Banos Sewage Ponds, Merced County on 29 December (CBC). A **Ruff** at the Thermalito Afterbay on 30 December (SK) was one of few records for Butte County. A rare winter **Wilson's Phalarope** was at the Yolo Basin on 30 December (CBC). **Mew Gulls** made news with one at Redding 10 February (B&C Y) seen on prior dates at Kutras Lake and the sewage ponds for one of few Shasta County

records, another in Marysville on 17 December (TM) for a second record for Yuba County, an adult at Woodward Park on 4 January (JD) for one of few Fresno County records, and one at Camanche Reservoir on 9 January (TE) for a first Amador County record. A **Thayer's Gull** (first winter) at Fresno Groundwater Recharge Ponds on 15 December (JD) was first Fresno County record followed by two more at the Fresno sewage ponds on 21 December (JD). Another first winter **Thayer's Gull** was on Camanche Reservoir on 12 January (JS, JLu) for a first record for Calaveras County. A first winter **Glaucous-winged Gull** at the Sacramento NWR on 5 February (BD) was one of few records for Glenn County. Three on Camanche Reservoir on 9-12 January (TE, JLu) was the second for both Amador and Calaveras counties. An adult **Western Gull** there on 12 January (JS, JLu) was a first for Calaveras County (it did not fly into Amador).

LANDBIRDS

A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Lake Solano on 20 December (KG) was in an area where there have been a few records in recent years. A **Red-naped Sapsucker** at the swan location near Ione on 4-19 January (KG) was a first for Amador County. Also at this location was an *Empidonax* flycatcher thought to be a **Dusky** or a **Hammond's Flycatcher** on 1 February (KG). The bird was silent and several characteristics point towards Dusky. In California, winter records for Hammond's far outnumber those of Dusky. To the west of Lodi along Turner Road, an immature male **Vermilion Flycatcher** was found on 20 December and was seen by many through February and another was at the Los Banos Wildlife Area in Merced County on 27-31 December (GG, KVV). A highlight for many birders this winter was the **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** first found at UC Davis on 12 December (SW), then not refound until 16 January (AK) where it was seen daily through the period on campus in Yolo County and across Hwy 80 at the sewage ponds in Solano County for first county records. **Barn Swallows** were once again found in December with a high count of 72 at the Los Banos CBC on 29 December. The Peace Valley CBC had its first ever **Barn Swallow** on 30 December. This may be the highest winter total ever for the Central Valley. A **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** was a greater surprise for winter at the Yolo Basin on 30 December (CBC) for a second winter record for Yolo County. An immature **Northern Shrike** at the Davis Wetlands from 9-21 February (JH) was the only one reported in the Central Valley this winter. A **Cassin's Vireo** was along Pleasant's Valley Road near Putah Creek in Solano County on 15 December (LE). A flock of 187 **Mountain Bluebirds** west of Hwy 505 in northern Yolo County on 10 January (TC) was one of the largest flocks that I have heard of in the Central Valley.

Woodbridge Regional Park in Lodi, San Joaquin County was this season's prime example of the "Patagonia Rest Stop Effect" where a **Brown Thrasher** wintered that attracted dozens of birders who also found a

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker on 18 December (JLu) and refound on 5 February (JK) for the second county record, a **Long-eared Owl** on 4 January (EG), and several **White-throated Sparrows**.

A rare wintering **Yellow Warbler** was found near the above-mentioned Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at the sewage ponds on 1 February (JH). A **Clay-colored Sparrow** near Putah Creek on 15 December (JH) was the fourth record for Yolo County. At least 10 **Chestnut-collared Longspurs** were found at Rd 16 just west of I-505 on 22 December (SH) and a few were seen in the general area through the winter. Another near the Davis Landfill on 6 January (SH) was only the eighth record for Yolo County. Very rarely reported in the Central Valley, a **Snow Bunting** at the Clifton Court Forebay from 27 February to mid-March (AS) was the second record for Contra Costa



County. A possible **Pink-sided Junco** was convincingly described from Sacramento on 26 December (DS, SW) and to their credit the observers were cautious in their assessment. There are few valid records of this form in Northern California and great care should be taken to rule out other forms of juncos.

Figure 1. Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) at Clifton Court Forebay, Contra Costa Co., March 2004.

photo by Todd Easterla

(CBC) = Christmas Bird Count, observers not identified in reports.

* Pending endorsement by the Sacramento Bird Records Committee

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