

Central Valley Bird Highlights: December 2005 through February 2006

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WATERBIRDS

A **Horned Grebe** at the Davis Landfill in January (DC, JHu) was a rare sighting for Yolo County. A **Red-necked Grebe** at the Winters Sewage Ponds on 11 January (RA, JHu) was the fourth Yolo County record. Totally unexpected was a **Laysan Albatross** in the deep water channel in Stockton on 13 January (DY). This would be a first San Joaquin County record, but there remains the distinct possibility that it was ship assisted in arriving in the valley. Up to three **Cattle Egrets** were seen in far western Placer County on 5 December (CH, BW). Interestingly, although regular just a few miles away in nearby Sutter County, this is perhaps only the third county record. One of the **Least Bitterns** at Consumnes River Preserve was heard on 3 December (JTr). This species is poorly known in winter, and although there are documented records from many areas where they breed, its winter population status is unclear. A family of five **Trumpeter Swans** was well documented at Esquon Ranch in Butte County on 23 December – 7 February (JSn, BD+). Eight **Trumpeter Swans** were also seen and photographed near Willows on 15-22 January (L&CL, JLx, MF) in Glenn County. A visit to Pixley National Wildlife Refuge (= NWR), Tulare County, yielded a surprising eight **Tundra Swans** and four **Cackling Geese** on 8 December (JLu). Elsewhere in Tulare County, a **Ross's Goose** at the Stoil Pond on 7-8 December (JLk, SS), a **Snow Goose** there and an additional two at Lake Success on 10 December (EP), and one of each species at the Alpaugh Irrigation District pond on 29 December (FO) were rare that far south in the valley. Even further south, seven **Snow Geese** and an adult **Thayer's Gull** were at Goose Lake in Kern County on 30 December (GF, MMcQ). Most white geese and swans winter south to Merced County, with stragglers rarely appearing farther south in the Central Valley. They are also rare in the foothills, and a **Ross's Goose** below Camanche Reservoir on 21 February (KM) was a first record for Calaveras County. At Pixley NWR, a **Eurasian Wigeon** on 10 December (EP) and a **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** on 31 January (SS) were notable for Tulare County. A male **Tufted Duck** at the O'Neill Forebay on 16-22 January (GG+) was at location where there have been numerous records over the years. The immature male **Harlequin Duck** found in November at the Stockton Sewage Ponds lingered through the winter and molted into adult plumage by spring (WH+). A female **Red-breasted Merganser** at Black Butte Reservoir on 8 December (BD, RSA) provided one of few Tehama County records of this species. Another along the American River near Nimbus Dam in Sacramento County on 10 December

(DC, CH) and a male downstream on 15+ December (DJ) were in an area from where there are few records.

Regular now in winter in the delta, a **Swainson's Hawk** at Gray Lodge on 4 December (BD) was north of this region, and five in Manteca along the San Joaquin River were south (DCo). These records provide more evidence that this species' winter range is expanding. One of the largest flocks of **Mountain Plovers** recorded in the Central Valley was found in western Tulare County on 12 December (SS, MSM) and was carefully counted as 645 birds. The **Snowy Plover** found on 11 November at the Davis Sewage Ponds lingered to at least 2 December (SH). A **Ruff** at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 26 February (SLa) probably wintered there. Two **Marbled Godwits** near Davis on 9 January (JHu, DC, RA) were the first recorded for that month in Yolo County. This species is very rare in winter in the valley north of the Tulare Basin. The Feather River near Oroville hosted an adult **Mew Gull** on 4 December (BD). This is one of the few locations where this species occurs with some regularity in the valley away from the Delta region. Another adult at the Ione Sewage Ponds on 10-11 December (TS, FS) was only the second record for Amador County. A **Mew Gull** at the Fresno Sewage Ponds on 18 December (LP) was one of few records for Fresno County. A **Thayer's Gull** in southeastern Kings County on 17 January (GH) provided one of few county records. A **Western Gull** at the Davis Landfill in January (DC, JHu) was at one of the few locations in the Central Valley where this coastal species regularly occurs during the winter. A **Glaucous-winged Gull** at the Redding Avenue Pond on 1 December (JLu, JLx) was one of few records for Kings County.

LANDBIRDS

One of the more thrilling birds to appear in the Solano County was a **Snowy Owl** on 13-14 January (JHu, SLa+) that provided a first county record and the first one in California since 1978! See Vol. 1: 3-6 for more details. Very rare on the valley floor, a juvenile **Band-tailed Pigeon** surprised observers at the Discovery Park in Sacramento on 7 December (CC). Amador County's second **Red-naped Sapsucker** was found on 4 December (DM) in the western area of the county. In Sacramento's Goethe Park, another **Red-naped Sapsucker** was seen on 6 December (DC). The male **Vermilion Flycatcher** that wintered last year in a golf course in between Kerman and Mendota, Fresno County, returned to spend a second winter (GW). The **Eastern Phoebe** found in November at the Tule Elk Reserve in Kern County was still present on 8 December (EP). Another was along Putah Creek at the Mace Avenue Bridge in both Solano and Yolo counties on 9-11 December (BCa). A big surprise near Fairfield was the discovery of a **Blue Jay** on 19 December that stayed until 25 April (MB, BB+) for the first Solano County record (see Vol. 9: 1-2 for details; note that the last date listed for this bird therein is incorrectly given as 25 March) and only the second record for the

Central Valley and one of fewer than 15 records for California. Not as rare, but still unusual on the valley floor, a **Steller's Jay** was seen in Davis on 8 January (ADeM). The **Palm Warbler** found in November at Gray Lodge Wildlife Area in Butte County was still present on 8-11 January (MC, BCa, JLx, JLu). The **Ovenbird** found at this location in November remained through the winter.

A **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** at the Sacramento State University campus on February 28 (CH) was far from areas where this species regularly occurs. The **Mountain Chickadee** found in November remained to spend the winter in Davis (MPe). A cooperative **Swamp Sparrow** provided a thrill to field trip participants at Friant on 10-12 December (JSe, JD) and also provided one of few records for Madera County. Another one at the Cache Creek Settling Basin in Yolo County on 11-15 December (JCS, SH) was probably the one seen earlier in November. A **Chestnut-collared Longspur** at the traditional longspur fields off of Brewer Road in westernmost Placer County on 29 December (CH) was the only one reported. At Slide Park in Davis, five **Evening Grosbeaks** were seen flying over on 9 February (MPe).

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