

Central Valley Bird Highlights: March through May 2006

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WATERBIRDS

A **Red-throated Loon** — very rare inland in California, especially on the valley floor — found on the Thermalito Afterbay in Butte County on 1 March (JSn) was joined by a **Pacific Loon** and a **Common Loon** on 3 March (BD, RSa), and seen through 19-21 March when it was also joined by a **Red-necked Grebe** (JLu, ADeM). This is a location where Red-necked Grebes have been seen in previous years. However, a **Red-necked Grebe** on Beale Air Force Base 15-16 May (EP, CH, DR, JLx, FO) was a first for Yuba County. In Solano County, an adult **Little Blue Heron** was photographed at a small pond along Highway 505 on 21 May (BT). Another adult was found in Sutter and Yuba counties on 18 May (JK) for a first Yuba County and second Sutter County record. There are few records of this species in the Central Valley. The first Central Valley **Fulvous Whistling Duck** in many years was discovered at Pixley National Wildlife Refuge (= NWR) in southwestern Tulare County on 29 April (JLk). This species is almost extirpated from California, so it is a pleasant surprise when one is found away from the Imperial Valley, the species' only remaining breeding area in the state.

Very rare north of Yolo County, a **Snowy Plover** was photographed at Llano Seco Wildlife Area on 30 April to 1 May (JSn, JCS) for only the third Butte County record. A pair attempted to nest at the Vic Fazio Wildlife Area, Yolo County (JHu, MS). There are only about four prior breeding attempts documented for the Sacramento Valley. A **Solitary Sandpiper** along Dry Creek on 24 April (DY) was a long-overdue first spring record for the species in San Joaquin County. Among the many others reported were one in south Sacramento County on 25 April (WH), one along Cache Creek in the Capay Valle, Yolo County, on 13 May (JHu), one at the Modesto Sewage Ponds on 26 April (SSa), one along the Tulare River in Tulare County on 10-11 April (SS, JLk), and another at the Toledo Pits, also in Tulare County, on 22-23 April (JLk). A **Sanderling** visited the Stockyard Ponds in Tulare County on 29 April (JLk). A wintering **Stilt Sandpiper** was found at Merced NWR on 6 March (PM), a location where this species has been found wintering in previous years. Three **Willetts** at the Ione Sewage Ponds 18-21 April (JLx, JCS) were photographed and seen in courtship flight in suitable breeding habitat in an adjacent wet meadow. They were not found on later dates, so nesting was not confirmed. This is only the second record of the species for Amador County. Another second Amador record was of a **Short-billed Dowitcher** heard and photographed at the Ione Sewage Ponds on 21 April (JCS).

A male **Costa's Hummingbird** along lower Putah Creek on 6 May (DC, CH) was a long overdue first for Solano County. Although fairly regular as spring migrants in black sage and other chaparral in the foothills surrounding the valley, **Calliope Hummingbirds** are rarely reported on the Central Valley floor. Therefore, one in Davis on 20 April (DS), two at the Yolo Grasslands Park on 6 May (MC) and two more were feeding on bottlebrush at Colusa NWR on 3 May (RF) were at unexpected locations. In the Jepson Prairie area, a **Gray Flycatcher** was photographed on 6 May (DC, CH) for only the second documented record for Solano County. **Least Bell's Vireos** were once again found in the Central Valley and appear to be recolonizing the region after the species was extirpated many decades ago. A singing bird at Pixley NWR 19-23+ May (PW, SL+) was not confirmed as having found a mate. However, the pair that nested at the San Joaquin NWR, Stanislaus County, in 2005 returned to breed again in 2006 (*vide* JG).

The wintering **Mountain Chickadee** in Davis was seen until 25 March (MPE). In Tehama County, a **Gray Catbird** was found near Los Molinos on 31 May (MR) for a first county record. A **Brown Thrasher** along the Tulare River in Porterville 14-16 April (SS, KK) was a first Tulare County record and one of few spring records for the Central Valley. A **Chestnut-sided Warbler** at the Sacramento Weir/Bypass on 31 May (RM, JCS) was one of few records for Yolo County. The wintering **Ovenbird** near Davis was last seen on 9 April (GE). An adult male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** coming to a feeder in Fresno (PS) from 19 March to 9 April mostly likely wintered there and is only the fourth record for the county. A **Black-throated Sparrow** as the O'Neill Forebay on 26 April (ST) was a first Merced County record. Another in the city of Fresno on 3 May (BW_i) was certainly lost and is one of few spring records for the valley floor. Butte County's overdue first record of **Grasshopper Sparrow** was found at the Chico State University Farm on 7 April (JS_n). A report of three **Grasshopper Sparrows** near Porterville on 30 April (SS) was one of the few records for Tulare County. Although somewhat regular as a rare wintering visitor to the Central Valley, a **Swamp Sparrow** at the Stoil Pond in Tulare County on 24-26 May (JLk) was an exceptional find for the spring. A **Great-tailed Grackle** flying over Red Bluff on 23 April (TaE) was only the third record for Tehama County, and another near Corning on 12 May (RS) furnished the fourth record. Two **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** at the Ione Sewage Ponds in Amador County on 29 April (LW) were far from known breeding locations. **Evening Grosbeak** is a rare winter visitor in the Central Valley, but one at Oak Grove Regional Park on 1 May (DY) was completely unexpected for that late date. The wintering **Evening Grosbeak** in Davis was last seen on 1 April (LW, JR).

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Chambers, Daryl Coldren, Al De Martini (ADeM), Tanner Easterla (TaE), Gil Ewing, Rob Fowler, Jim Gain, Cliff Hawley, Joan Humphrey (JHu), Jon King, Kim Kuska, Steve Laymon, John Lockhart (JLk), Jim Lomax (JLx), John Luther (JLu), Ron Melcer, Peter Metropulos, Frances Oliver, Ed Pandolino, Michael Perrone (MPe), Michael Rogner, Deren Ross, Jim Rowoth, Sal Salerno (SSa), Rob Santry (RSa), Mary Schiedt, Darrell Sloten, Jim Snowden (JSn), John Sterling (JCS), Penny Stewart, Steve Summers, Scott Terrill, Bonnie Trejo, Liz West, Pam Williams, Bruce Williford (BWi) and David Yee.



Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) in western Placer County, 5 November 2005.

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