

Central Valley Bird Highlights: August through November 2014

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The famous **Falcated Duck** returned to the Colusa NWR on 30 October (MV) for its 3rd winter, and remained through the period. Unusually early for fall migration, a **Common Loon** was at the Thermalito Afterbay on 3 September (MF) and one in southern Kings County on 13 September (MSy) was only about the sixth record for that county, which does not have a deep water reservoir suitable for loons. Tulare County hosted a lost **Tundra Swan** on the Friant Kern Canal on 18 November (DF). Two **Surf Scoters** were a treat to see at the Corcoran Res. in Kings County on 29 October (MSy). An adult **Glossy Ibis** at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 16 August (JTr) was the first Sacramento County record of this species, which has expanded westward into California in recent years.

Three **Snowy Plovers** were at the Yolo Bypass WA on 16 August (SCH) and individuals were at the Fresno WTP on 27 August (GW) and Madera WTP on 25 August (GW) where somewhat regular in fall migration. **American Golden-Plover** is a rare migrant anywhere in the state, so one near Los Banos, Merced County on 3 October (KVV) was exciting. A few **Pacific Golden-Plovers** were at their usual haunts with large **Black-bellied Plover** flocks at a few WTPs, but one at the Hanford WTP on 9 November (MSy) and another in the Tulare Basin on 28 September (MSy) were rare for Kings County. **Willetts** are rare in the Sacramento Valley, so one at Sacramento NWR in Glenn County on 18 October (HF) was noteworthy.

A **Marbled Godwit** was at Colusa NWR on 18 November (SSt) and stayed for several weeks for a rare and very late date for the Sacramento Valley. Another was a rare visitor to the Madera WTP on 15 September (KS). The top shorebird of the season was the **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 22 September (TEa). This Asian shorebird is rare anywhere in the state, but this location has the most records for an inland site. The only **Ruff** reported was at Alpaugh ponds in Tulare County on 12 October (JLk). **Stilt Sandpipers** are rare migrants and occasional winter visitors in the region. One was at the Yolo Bypass WA on 20 August (JT) and two were in southern Kings County where almost annually seen. As usual, a few **Sanderlings**, **Solitary**, **Baird's** and **Semipalmated sandpipers** were reported from scattered locations.

A dark morph **Long-tailed Jaeger** was in southern Kings County on 24 August (MSy) and a **Parasitic Jaeger** was on Folsom Lake on 19-28 September (CCo+). These pelagic species are occasionally found inland during fall migration. Unlike recent falls, only three **Franklin's Gulls** were found with two first cycle birds near along Hwy 5 west of Lodi on 22-29 November (AS+) and one in Kings County on 30 November (MSy). As usual, a few **Sabine's Gulls** were reported in the fall with a juvenile at the O'Neill Forebay in Merced County on 24 September (KVV), one-two adults and one juvenile at the Tulare WTP on 8-9 September (DF+), a juvenile at the Fresno WTP on 16-24 September (GW, EE+), and two at Folsom Lake flying into Sacramento/Placer/El Dorado counties on 19 September (LP+) with four present on 21 September (JCS+), three on 22-23 September, and one adult on 28 September (JLD) and a juvenile at the Tracy WTP in San Joaquin County on 23-24 September (DY). A first cycle **Western Gull** was in southern Kings County on 20 September through 3 October (MSy, Jlk+). It had a blue band consistent with those banded on the Farallon Islands off San Francisco. This coastal species is very rare this far south in the region. **Common Terns** are regular fall migrants through the region in small numbers. Six at the Chico WTP was a long overdue first record for Butte County on 21-22 September (MF+), and but were quickly followed by the second record with two at the Thermalito Afterbay on 23-24 September (JCS+). Three were at the O'Neill Forebay on 24 September (KVV) and two were on Folsom Lake on 21-25 September (TEa+) increasing to four on 28 September (JLD).

Montane birds were quite prevalent on the valley floor with scattered records of **Band-tailed Pigeons**, **Steller's Jays**, **Evening Grosbeaks** (three records in Stanislaus County where exceptionally rare) and especially **Varied Thrushes** (in huge numbers in many areas). A rarely seen migrant **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was photographed in Sacramento on 4 November (LB). A **Williamson's Sapsucker** was an unexpected montane visitor at Cosumnes River Preserve on 29 November (JTr) which established the first Sacramento County record and one of few for the region.

A **Chimney Swift** was seen with Vaux's Swifts near old town Sacramento on 8 September (GEw). Three rare **Least Flycatchers** were observed with one each on Babel Slough in Yolo County on 7 and 16 September (TEa) and one photographed for Kings County's first record on 18 October (MSy). A late migrant **Hammond's Flycatcher** visited Laughlin Park in Stockton on 7 November (KM). An adult male **Vermilion Flycatcher** was seen once again at Sante Fe Grade and Wilson Road in Merced County. Found on 3 November (JH, RB), it is likely to be the same bird present each winter since 2007. Two female **Vermilion Flycatchers** were also present in Merced County with one at the Merced NWR on 18-29 November (LD+) and the other at Sante Fe Grade on 19 November (KVV). An **Eastern Phoebe** was also on Sante Fe Grade on 17-19 November (RB, JH+) and another was at 14 ½ St and Nevada Ave in Kings County on 25 October (JLk).

A big surprise was the region's second **Yellow-throated Vireo** found at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 20-21 September (JTr+) for Sacramento County's first record. The first regional record of **Philadelphia Vireo** was at Lodi Lakes in San Joaquin County on 20-21 September (DY+). A very late migrant **Warbling Vireo** was in southern Kings County on 9 November (MSy). **Bell's Vireos** were extirpated from the region many decades ago, but have been making a comeback due to conservation success in their southern California breeding range. One along the Feather River in Sutter County on 7 September (DSk) was the northernmost record in recent years but sadly the only record this fall. A juvenile **Northern Shrike** was along Rancho Tehama Rd in western Tehama County on 28 November into late December (BED+). A **Sage Thrasher** at Deer Creek Hills in eastern Sacramento County on 22 September (DW) fit the fall migration pattern for this scarce migrant.

Purple Martins are cavity nesters that have been nearly extirpated in the region by the aggressive, non-native Eurasian Starlings competing for nesting sites. Very few are seen outside of Sacramento metropolitan area where they nest in artificial holes under elevated freeways and overpasses at a few locations. Therefore, one at the Chico WTP on 9 August (MRg) was a noteworthy migrant, but eclipsed by a first Kings County record on Utica Road on 7 September (MSy+).

Birders hope for eastern warblers while birding in the region, so a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** on Utica Road in Kings County on 7 September (MSy+) was an exciting find and a first county record. Birders keeping an eye out for birds in their backyards in Sacramento area found a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** on 23-26 September (TM), and a **Tennessee Warbler** on 3 September (DB) and a **Blackpoll Warbler** on 9 September (DB). Butte County's first record of **Magnolia Warbler** was at Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park on 23-26 September (MRg+). There are very few regional records of this vagrant compared to desert and coastal localities. Stanislaus County's second record of **Northern Parula** was on the late dates of 21-29 November (JG, SSa+) at Basso Bridge in the eastern area of the county. A **Black-and-white Warbler** along the western shore of the O'Neill Forebay in Merced County on 8 September (SRs, DRs, JLD) further cemented that location's reputation as a great vagrant trap. Another at Ancil Hoffman Park in Sacramento County on 1-5 September (MM, DK+) was eclipsed by the very rare **Canada Warbler** on 11-25 September (MSw+), which is one of few records for the entire Central Valley. Putah Creek in Yolo/Solano counties once again proved that frequent searching in good riparian habitat in the region can yield results as shown by a **Northern Waterthrush** on 1-9 September (RMu), a **Blackpoll Warbler** on 7-9 September (MPe), a **Tennessee Warbler** on 16-22 September (JCS), and an **American Redstart** on 21-25 September (HC, JGo, EL). Another **Blackpoll Warbler** was at Babel Slough in Yolo County on 16 September (TEa).

A brilliant red male **Summer Tanager** excited birders at Bidwell Park in Chico, Butte County on 28 August (SA+). The **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** discovered in late July continued to 1 August (GEw, JLx) in Rancho Cordova, Sacramento County. **Indigo Buntings** are rare visitors to the region, so a singing male was a treat to see at the Willows Gravel Ponds in Glenn County on 6-12 August (DRs, SRs+).

Rare on the valley floor, a **Green-tailed Towhee** was in Tulare on 6 September (RH). A male **Lark Bunting** on Frankenhiemer Road in eastern Stanislaus County on 20 November (JG) and a female/juvenile plumaged bird along Tehama Ave in western Kings County on 25-26 October (MSy+) were the only ones reported. This prairie species is annually found in the region with records from every season. **Brewer's Sparrows** are probably regular fall migrants in very low numbers and can be easily missed in the extensive grassland and agricultural habitats in which they're found. One at Red Bluff Recreation Area on 6 September (BED) was one of few recorded for the region in Tehama County. A juvenile **Black-throated Sparrow** visited the Bufferlands in Sacramento County on 11 August (CCo) for one of few records the county. The North Davis **Harris's Sparrow** returned for its fourth winter on 26 October (CD). The only **Swamp Sparrows** reported was one at Cache Creek in Yolo County on 29 October (BC) and the other along the Tule River in sw Tulare County on 28 November (SDS). One of the most exciting finds was of the female **Rusty Blackbird** on Sante Fe Grade in Merced County on 13-19 November (SM, VB, PB, JK+).

The observers are: Skip Auger, Pat Bacchetti, Ralph Baker, Virginia Bonham, Liz Bredberg, Dan Brown, Brent Campos, Helen Chmura, Chris Conard (CCo), Laurie Dann, Bruce Deuel (BED), Chris Dunford, Jon Dunn (JLD), Todd Easterla (TEa), Elias Elias, Gil Ewing (GEw), Dane Fagundes, Matthew Forster, Harry Fuller, Jim Gain, Jessie Godfrey (JGo), Steve Hampton (SCH), Rob Hansen, John Harris, Joanne Katanic, Dan Kopp, Jim Lomax (JLx), Eric LoPresti, Tim Manolis, Mark Martucci, Kurt Mize, Susan Murphy, Roger Muskat (RMu), Michael Perrone, Michael Rogner (MRg), Diane Rose (DRs), Sal Salerno (SSa), Mark Sawyer (MSw), Ken Schneider, Alison Sheehey, Dan Skalos, Mark Stacey (MSy), John Sterling (JCS), Steve Summers (SDS), Jim Thomas, John Trochet (JTr), Matt Victoria, Kent Van Vuren, Deb Weston, Gary Woods, and David Yee.

Abbreviations used: WA=State Wildlife Area, WTP=Wastewater Treatment Plant; CBRC=California Bird Records Committee; NWR=National Wildlife Refuge.