

Central Valley Bird Highlights: December 2014 through February 2015

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Two **Trumpeter Swans** visited the Chico WTP in Butte County on 20 January+ (MF+). Folsom Lake once again hosted a few loons including two **Pacific** and one **Red-throated** on 4-7 December (BWb, CrS); all three were in Placer County waters with two **Red-throated Loons** there on 12 February (DW) and a **Red-necked Grebe** on 9 January (RP). Another **Red-throated Loon** was on the O'Neill Forebay in Merced County on 14 January (KVV+) and the fourth of the season was on Kelso Road in the Delta region of San Joaquin County on 4-22 January (SHu+). A rare inland **Brown Pelican** was at Lake Success in Tulare County on 20 December (DF).

Birders rarely get to visit the Modesto WTP with only one day per month (2nd Saturdays only with prior permission) available for public access, but birders are often rewarded with good birding. On 4 January a **Tufted Duck** was photographed there (JG+). Hunters shot two **Surf Scoters** at the Sacramento NWR in Glenn County on 30 November (*fide* SK). Tehama County's first **Long-tailed Duck** was in the pond below Black Butte Dam on 4-6 January (MRg+) and another was on the American River at Upper Sunrise in Sacramento County on 31 December (GEw). As usual, a few **Red-breasted Mergansers** were reported in the valley with a female at Bridgeway Pond in Yolo County on 31 December (KS), one at Folsom Lake in Placer County waters on 7 December (CG), one on the American River at Upper Sunrise in Sacramento County on 18 December-25 January (GEw, DAA), one below Tulloch Dam in Tuolumne/Calaveras counties on 18 December (JSL), and one at O'Neill Forebay in Merced County on 14 January (KVV).

Due to their secretive nature, the full extent of **Black Rail's** wintering range is only a conjecture, so one recorded calling from Santa Fe Grade Road on 5 December (CJ) was an extraordinary find for Merced County. The closest previously known location is White Slough west of Lodi in San Joaquin County.

Mountain Plovers can be difficult to find wintering in the region. Up to 54 were in a field on County Line Road on 29 January to 1 February (CKf) where a flock was located a few years ago that established the first Colusa County record. Often flocks return to "traditional" winter locations, so this site should be monitored in the future. A **Snowy Plover** was at the Fresno-Clovis WTP on 15 December (TF, MSt). **Solitary Sandpipers** winter in South America, so one along Santa Fe Grade Road in Merced County was a surprise on 8 January (KJ)

and one wintered on Road 208 east of Hwy 41 in Madera County (NJ). **Marbled Godwits** rarely winter in the valley and are notably rare north of Yolo County, so one at the Colusa NWR on 1 February (JCS) was unexpected.

Glaucous-winged Gulls are rare north of Sacramento and Yolo counties, so one at Gray Lodge on 16 December (*fide* BED) was noteworthy for Butte County. A first cycle bird was at the pond below Black Butte Dam on 5-10 January (JCS, TEa+) for Tehama County's second record. **Franklin's Gulls** are increasingly found in winter in the region (they normally winter in South America). Two immatures were at Corcoran Reservoir in Kings County on 20 December (MSy), and another at Ave 144 and Road 96 in Tulare County on 25 December (DF) was joined by a **Mew** and a **Thayer's Gull**. A beautiful adult **Iceland Gull** was photographed downstream of the Nimbus Fish Hatchery on the American River in Sacramento County on 2 January (CG). Two first winter **Iceland**, a **Glaucous-winged** and up to ten **Thayer's gulls** were identified at the Teapot Dome Landfill near Porterville in Tulare County (JLD, SDS+) on 9-10 January. Visits to this landfill on 21-2 January yielded an **Iceland**, **Glaucous**, **Lesser Black-backed**, three **Glaucous-winged** and tens of **Thayer's gulls** (SDS, DF). The only rare gull report at Kutras Lake in Redding, Shasta County was of a **Mew Gull** found on 15 January (BY).

Band-tailed Pigeons were in far greater numbers and in more locations than usual from eastern Stanislaus through Sacramento/Yolo counties throughout the winter. A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was photographed along Putah Creek at the Lake Solano Bridge area in Yolo County on 31 January (DT+) and on the Solano County side on 27 January (CDf) and 15 February (SHo). Another was in Redding on 27 December (*fide* BY) for the first record of the valley section of Shasta County and one was at the O'Neill Forebay in Merced County on 5 February (PDU+) where it joined a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker seen from 29 January to 5 February (PDU+). Two **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** at Lost Lake Recreation Area in Fresno County on 12-23 January (RSx+) were at a location where this species has been seen in recent winters.

Tropical Kingbird is a regular, but rare, fall migrant and winter visitor to coastal California, but there are very few records for the valley. One frequenting the fences along the Tulare WTP on 4 January (JLk+) was the first for Tulare County. **Vermilion Flycatchers** are nearly annual in the region but still rare and noteworthy. Merced County had more than its fair share with a female at the Merced NWR on 1-7 December (DSw+), an adult male at the Grasslands WA in on 8 January (GG) along with two along Sante Fe Grade Road continuing from the fall. Tulare County hosted an adult male on 25 January in near the Milo Fire Station (GP). An Eastern Phoebe at the Merced NWR on 14 January (BD) was the only report of this rare winter visitor. All **Empidonax** flycatchers are rare in winter in the region, but most records are of presumed **Pacific-slope** (but cannot rule out **Cordilleran**) and **Hammond's**.

A “*Western*”, presumed **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** was at Gray Lodge WA in Butte County on 5 January (LKh). One **Hammond’s Flycatcher** was at Babel Slough in Yolo County on 1 January (SCH, MPe) and a second was at Land Park in Sacramento on 2 January (JLp).

Also rare in winter, a **Cassin’s Vireo** was mist netted at the Cache Creek Preserve on 29 December (SaH), and a montane **Townsend’s Solitaire** was along Goodnow Slough (SaH), both in Yolo County. A **Cassin’s Vireo** photographed along the American River in Sacramento on 8 February (KVV) undoubtedly wintered locally. A **Townsend’s Solitaire** at Hatfield State Park in Stanislaus County was found on 22 January (NJ). The **Northern Shrike** found in Tehama County in November stayed through the end of December. At long last, a **Black-and-white Warbler** was cooperative for birders in Yolo County while present along Babel Slough from at least 27 December to 24 January (RT). The **Northern Parula** found in November at Basso Bridge in eastern Stanislaus County was seen again through 27 December (DG, JH, KH+). The male **Summer Tanager** was documented to have returned for its fourth winter at Roeding Park in Fresno when found on 17 December (mob).

A rare wintering **Green-tailed Towhee** was a nice find along Hwy 680 in Solano County on 18 December–4 January (S&DR+) as was the one at Bravo Lake Botanical Gardens in Tulare County on 17 January (DF). A **Lark Bunting**, also great to see in the region, was on Tim Bell Road in Stanislaus County on 21-24 December (JHH+) and two more were on the Jepson Prairie in Solano County on 10 February (ELoP+) and another found in October was seen again on 23 January along Tehama Ave in western Kings County (MSy). The only **Swamp Sparrows** reported were individuals at the Yolo Bypass WA in Yolo County on 23-28 January (LJE+), in Merced County near Los Banos on 28 December (GF) and the Grasslands WA on 16 January, and in Sacramento County at the Cosumnes River Preserve on 6 January (KSw) and William Pond along the American River on 24 February (DW). The adult **Harris’s Sparrow** in North Davis stayed through another winter, its fourth, (CDf) and another wintered in Red Bluff (MSw) from 31 December to 27 February for one of few Tehama County records. An immature visited a backyard in Modesto from 10 January to 11 February in Stanislaus County (*fide* SSa).

Another standout bird for Yolo County was the male **Cassin’s Finch** in North Davis from 3-7 January (KE+), with another at Caswell Park on 4 January (*fide* HMR) for the second record for Stanislaus County. Rare montane **Evening Grosbeaks** were once again found in the region with single birds in Woodland, Yolo County on 16 January (BC), in Modesto, Stanislaus County on 4 December (JG), 17 in Clovis, Fresno County on 31 January (JND), and Porterville, Tulare County on 14 January (SDS). This species is absent most winters in the valley.

Observers: Dan Airola (DAA), Brent Campos, Jeff Davis (JND), Chris Dunford (CDf), Bob Dunn, Jon Dunn (JLD), Pete Dunton (PDu), Ken Ealy, Todd Easterla (TEa), Leo Edson (LJE), Elias Elias, Andy Engilis Jr., Gil Ewing, Dane Fagundes, Tracy Farrington, George Folsom, Jim Gain, Gary Gerstenberg, Dan Gilman, Cory Gregory, Jody Hallstrom, Steve Hampton (SCH), John Harris (JHH), Sacha Heath (SaH), Kat Hagodus, Steve Huckabone (SHu), Nancy Jewett, Cheryl Johnson, Kent Johnson, Nina Jones, Logan Kahle (LKh), Clay Kempf, Shelly Kirn, Jolie Lipsig (JLp), Eric LoPresti (ELoP), John Luther (JSL), Michael Perrone (MPe), Gary Potter, Ron Pozzi, Harold Reeve (HMR), Steve and Diane Rose (S&DR), Sal Salerno (SSa), Rich Saxton (RSx), Mark Stacy (MSy), John C. Sterling (JCS), Michael Stubblefield (MSt), Steve Summers (SDS), Dale Swanberg, Michelle Swarthout (MSw), Kirk Swensen, Craig Swolgaard (CrS), Daniel Thompson, Robin Tigred, Kent Van Vuren (KVv), Bruce Webb, Dan Williams (DaW), and Bob Yutzy.

CBRC=California Bird Records Committee; NWR=National Wildlife Refuge;
mob= many observers; WTP=Wastewater Treatment Plant; WA=State Wildlife Area.



Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*). Kern NWR, Kern County. 2 March 2015.

Photo @John Sterling