

Central Valley Bird Highlights: December 2015 through February 2016

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Tundra Swans are rare in the valley south of Merced County so four along 10th Ave in Kings County were noteworthy as was the nearby **Red-breasted Merganser** on 16-29 December (MSy+). Three **Trumpeter Swans** were heard and seen well along Harter Road in Butte County on 6 February (CD+). A **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** was at the Sacramento NWR in Glenn County on 30 January–14 February (KD+). This subspecies is seen annually in the region in winter. Very rare inland, a **Brant** was with Canada Geese in Clovis, Fresno County on 8-12 January (RSx). O'Neill Forebay in western Merced County is one of the best spots for rare inland waterbirds. A **Pacific Loon** and two **Red-breasted Mergansers** were there on 1 December (KVV) with one merganser remaining to 29 January. An immature male **Surf Scoter** was there from 21 January–1 February (ADeM+). Another **Red-breasted Merganser** was at the Thermalito Afterbay in Butte County on 31 December–2 January (BED+), a female was at Black Butte Lake in Tehama County on 4 February (MM), and a pair was on Stony Gorge Reservoir in Glenn County on 6-10 February (JL, MM+). The east levee on Sherman Island is an excellent place to find scoters in Sacramento County. Five **Surf Scoters** were there on 2 January (CC) and six on 15 February (AMcD).

Two **California Condors** were spotted flying over northern Tulare County on 5 December (SDS, PS) where they haven't been recorded in decades. Black Butte Reservoir has few records of loons, so a **Pacific Loon** on 10 January was unexpected (SA). A **Red-necked** and **Horned grebe** at the Mendota WA in Fresno County on 26 December–21 January (GC+) were rare for that location.

The **Ruff** is a Eurasian shorebird that is annually seen in fall in the valley with occasional winter records. This season, one was found at the Merced NWR on 23 December–26 February (HC+), and another was at Pixley NWR in Tulare County on 1 January–12 February (DK+). An overdue Contra Costa County first county record was the **Stilt Sandpiper** on Bethel Island on 18-19 January (AL+). There are very few state records of wintering **Solitary Sandpiper**, so one returning for a second winter near Fresno from 24 January–6 February was extraordinary (NJ+). A **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Anderson River Park was a rare winter record for Shasta County on 10 January–24 February (BP).

The Gaffery Road gull spot on the San Joaquin/Stanislaus county line has been the best location for rare gulls in both of those counties since its

discovery a few years ago. A third cycle **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was there on 6 December–2 January (GY+) as were two first cycle **Glaucous Gulls** on 8-26 December (JCS+). One of those first cycle **Glaucous Gulls** and nineteen adult **Western Gulls** were at the nearby Koster Road gravel pit on 6 December (JH) in San Joaquin County. An adult **Glaucous Gull** was at the Cosumnes River Preserve in Sacramento County 17-21 January (JTr). As now expected, a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** joined the masses of gulls at the Yolo Landfill on 30 December (SCH), another at Folsom Lake at Granite Bay in Placer County on 6 February (TEa+), and Tulare County's fourth was at Bravo Lake on 3 January (DF). A likely returning adult **Slaty-backed Gull** from last winter discovered in mid-January (RM) was still present on 25 January (JCS) at the Scalley Road entrance to the landfill west of Fairfield in Solano County. A **Glaucous-winged Gull** was a rare find at the Sacramento NWR in Glenn County on 31 January–10 February (JL+). The first CV record of a **Black-headed Gull** since the 1980s occurred when one was seen at the Modesto WTP on 14 December (HMR) and luckily for birders it was refound at the Ceres WTP on 26 December (HMR) where it remained to 4 January. It was the first record for Stanislaus County. Much less rare but noteworthy south of the Delta, two **Mew Gulls** were at the Hanford WTP on 20 December in Kings County (MSy).

Two **White-winged Doves** were found roosting with **Mourning Doves** at the Holland Tract in eastern Contra Costa County on 18 December–21 January (LK+).

Eastern Phoebes are nearly annual winter visitors to the valley. One at the Merced NWR on 5 December (PDu) was a location with multiple previous records as was one in Bakersfield on 1 January (JW). The best find of the winter was the Central Valley's first record of a **Brown-crested Flycatcher** on the Holland Tract in eastern Contra Costa County on 16 December (LK+). Unfortunately, it was seen for only a few minutes and not refound. Fortunately, it was well photographed and described. Colusa County's first **Vermilion Flycatcher** was an adult male found at the Maxwell Cemetery on 23 January–14 February (SA+) where many birders enjoyed its beauty. King County's second record of **Tropical Kingbird** was in Hanford on 6–8 February (MSy+) where two had wintered in 2012-2013. The amazing **Couch's Kingbird** found in the fall was still present through 18 January in Visalia (mob).

Of the winter vireos in the valley, **Hutton's** is locally common, and both **Plumbeous** and **Cassin's** are rare but nearly annual. However a **Warbling Vireo** at the Colusa-Sacramento SRA on 5 December (SA) was extraordinary with few winter season records in the state. In Yolo County, a **Cassin's Vireo** wintered at the North Area Pond in Davis but only discovered on 4 January (NR) and another was on the UC Davis Campus on 26 January (IT).

A rare wintering **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** frequented the Bridgeway Pond in Yolo County when seen from 24 December–7 January

(MG+). A **Winter Wren** (rare eastern vagrant split from west coast Pacific Wren) was photographed and its call recorded at the O'Neill Forebay for the first Merced record on 1-4 December (KVV, GW). It may or may not have been seen subsequently although a **Pacific Wren** was also found there potentially confusing birders looking for it. A **Townsend's Solitaire** was there on 8 December (ADeM). Two **Lapland Longspurs** in grasslands west of Corning in Tehama County on 4-8 January (MSw+) were the only longspurs reported this season. An eastern vagrant **Black-and-white Warbler** was at the Lodi Lake Nature Area in San Joaquin County on 23 December–12 January (FO+) where one had wintered in the 1990s. An adult male **Summer Tanager** provided color to the Genetic Resource Center grounds, Chico in Butte County on 6-7 February (CD+).

The only **Swamp Sparrows** reported was one along Big Break Trail in Contra Costa County on 30 December (DW), two at the Yolo Bypass WA in Yolo County on 30 December–13 February (TEa+), and one at William Pond Park in Sacramento County on 25 January (MkS). A potential first Central Valley record of a **Field Sparrow** was initially found at the Mendota WA in Fresno County on 29 December (PG), well described but not confirmed until independently refound on 8 January (SDS+) and seen the following day (JSL). We await CBRC acceptance of this record. Surprisingly, the **Black-chinned Sparrow** found at Babel Slough in Yolo County in the fall was found again 14 January–26 February (MkS+) to establish the first winter record for the valley.

A **Cassin's Finch** visited from the mountains to a yard in Red Bluff in Tehama County on 27 December (MSw). Continuing the montane finch invasion into the valley, **Red Crossbills** made a big incursion as nine visited the pines in the campground at O'Neill Forebay for a rare Merced County record (PDU+) on 5-8 December, a flock of ten was at the Colusa-Sacramento SRA on 5-6 December (SA+), 24 were in Sacramento on 6 December–2 January (CH), a flock was at the Jacob Myers Park on 15-22 December in Stanislaus County (RB+), several visited a backyard in Stockton on 18 December (GQ), and Sutter County's first record was discovered with three at the cemetery in the town of Sutter on 29 December–7 January (JSL+), up to eighteen at Turlock Lake in Stanislaus County on 30 December–2 January (SBT, HMR+), up to 52 at Kearney Park in Fresno County 18-21 January (GF, ADeM+), a flock in north Davis on 23 February (SCH), and up to twenty in Chico 6-7 February (MF+).

Evening Grosbeaks were once again sighted in Yolo County with one in the Capay Valley on 6 December (SCH) and one in Davis on 24 December (StH), five on 6 February (GEw) and two on 23 January (SCH). **Crossbills** and **Evening Grosbeaks** were at the Old Cemetery in Sacramento on 9-13 December (CC, JHo) with seventeen crossbills on the latter date. More **Evening Grosbeaks** were found with two in Lodi on 19-26 December (DGY+) in San Joaquin County, one in Ceres on 22 December (HMR) in Stanislaus

County, and eight in Porterville, Tulare County on 30 January (PS).

Observers: Stuart Angerer, Ralph Baker, Hugo Ceja, George Chrisman, Chris Conard, Kathy DeFay, Al DeMartini (ADeM), Colin Dillingham, Pete Dunton (PDu), Todd Easterla (TEa), Gil Ewing, Dane Fagundes, George Folsom, Matt Forster, Maureen Geiger, Peter Grunow, Steve Hampton (SCH), Cliff Hawley, Jim Holmes (JHo), Lisa Hug (LH), Stanton Hunter (StH), Nina Jones, Logan Kahle (LKh), Diana Kinder, John Lewis, Albert Linkowski, John Luther (JSL), Amy McDonald (AMcD), Mary Murchowski, Frances Oliver, Gaylan Queirolo, Barbara Peck, Harold Reeve (HMR), Noah Reid, Michael Rogner, Mark Sawyer (MkS), Rick Saxton (RSx), Mark Stacy (MSy), John C Sterling (JCS), Priscilla Summers, Steve Summers (SDS), Michele Swartout (MSw), Ian Taylor, Scott Terrill (SBT), John Trochet (JTr), Kent Van Vuren (KVV), Denise Wight, John Wilson, Gary Woods, and David Yee (DGY).

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



Male American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*). 13 February 2011.
Living Desert Reserve, Palm Desert, Riverside Co., California

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