

Central Valley Bird Highlights: December 2017 through February 2018

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Brant are coastal birds that winter in large bays/estuaries where they feed on eelgrass. One photographed at Staten Island in San Joaquin County on 19 December (IS-C) was one of few found in the valley in recent years. A male **Tufted Duck** was with scaup off Bethel Island in Contra Costa County from 22-27 February (LK+). This Eurasian species is almost annually found in the valley. A **Laysan Albatross**, lost in the fog in the San Francisco Bay, flew back and forth between the Martinez and Carquinez bridges under clear skies for an hour and a half before flying back to the bay on 23 January (EPI+). Crazy bird. A **Red-necked Grebe** was a nice find at Lagoon Valley Park in Solano County on 24-25 February (RM+).

Mountain Plovers are rare north of the Delta region, so one along Abel Road east of Williams on 10 December (KS) was noteworthy for Colusa County, as most of the few county records have come from County Line Road. As usual, a **Pacific Golden-Plover** was with the **Black-bellied Plover** wintering flock at the Woodland WTP in Yolo County on 8 December (CH+), and it or another was at the Yolo Bypass W.A. on 19 February (DH+). Other **Pacific Golden-Plovers** were much less expected but certainly anticipated as Placer County's long overdue first record when found along Brewer Road west of Lincoln on 28 December—2 January (JT, EH+) and Colusa's second or third on Poundstone Road on 17-18 February (SA+). **Snowy Plover** is a rare fall and spring migrant in the valley north of the Tulare Basin, so one found along Folsom Lake at the Granite Bay access in Placer County on 8 January (RPz) was unexpected for winter.

As expected, a **Ruff** was found wintering in the valley where one was present at the Yolo Bypass W.A. on 17-27 February (SHo+) and another in the Tulare Basin on 2 February (DR). Less expected was the **Stilt Sandpiper** at the Yolo Bypass W.A. on 12+ February (KB+), and even less expected was Colusa County's first on Lonestar Road on 23-29 January (WRy+). The majority of the few winter records come from the Tulare Basin in the far southern area of the valley.

An adult **Glaucous Gull** visited the Woodland WTP on 8 December (JH) where it is rare. This northern species is annually found in winter at the nearby Yolo County landfill. Two were at the Yolo Bypass W. A. on 27 January (FF+). Another was in the large gull flock at Folsom Lake at Beals Point in

Placer County on 31 December—2 January (DW+). Now expected annually, a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was photographed at the Yolo County landfill on 17 December (DW), another was at Folsom Lake at Beals Point in Placer County on 2 January (BWb), and it or another was at Lake Natoma in Sacramento County on 6 January (AL). **Mew Gulls** are rare north of the Delta region, so one at Black Buttes Res. in Glenn County on 1-14 February (JLD+) and another in Williams, Colusa County on 29 January—3 February (EH+) were two of few records for either county. The **Franklin's Gull** reported in late fall continued at the Woodland WTP in Yolo County to at least 6 December (EVW+). An ultra-rare **Black-headed Gull** from Eurasia was at the Modesto WTP on 9 December (SSa+) for the second Stanislaus County record (the first was in 2015).

Common Ground-Doves continue their northward march in the Central Valley when a pair was found north of Kettleman City in Kings County on 30 December—early January (MSy+), and three West of Fresno on 9 January to 2 February were at the same location where the first Fresno County record was established in July 2017 (GW). The male **Vermilion Flycatcher** at the Maxwell Cemetery that was the first Colusa County record, returned for a second winter. Another male at Dawson Lake in eastern Stanislaus County was found on 28 December and remained through the winter (RB, XS+). Merced County always gets **Vermilion Flycatchers** in winter, and this period one was at the Merced NWR on 2 February (CM). King County's second **Cassin's Kingbird** frequented a city park in Lemoore from 12-21 December (MSy+). An **Eastern Phoebe** briefly visited Porterville, Tulare County on 15 January (SDS). An immature **Northern Shrike** at the Sacramento NWR in Glenn County delighted those who saw it but frustrated those who missed it over several weeks from 28 December to 10 February (TC+). In Yolo County, single **Cassin's Vireos** were in north Davis on 1 December—7 February (KSw+), and at Cache Creek Preserve on 3 December (BC). Always a treat to find in the valley where rare, an **America Dipper** was at Knights Ferry Rec Area on 23 December—28 January (HR+) for one of few Stanislaus County records.

The bird of the year was California's first and North America's third **Citrine Wagtail** at the Yolo Bypass W.A. on 15-16 December. It was discovered and photographed by Maurice DeMille, a visiting birder from Utah, who reported it on eBird late at night. The following morning was extremely windy, so only two early birders saw it before it flushed and was never seen again.

The second-best bird of the year was the **Curve-billed Thrasher** visiting a neighborhood in Woodland, Yolo County, from at least 8 January when first reported in eBird (KC+), but neighbors said it was there since October. It was last reported on 8 March after being extensively photographed and seen by many birders. Not only was this the first northern California record of this species but also the first California record of the eastern *curvirostre* group of

subspecies that breeds in Texas and eastern Mexico and occasionally wanders as far north as Canada as a vagrant. The prior records for the state were of the subspecies that breeds in Arizona.

Two **Sage Thrashers** were in the valley including one in Tehama County at Meridian and Lassen roads on 10 February (MF+) and another in a backyard (!!) in Davis on 8-28 February (MPE). Butte County's fourth record of **Palm Warbler** was established at the Chico WTP on 2-3 December (DSx) and one found in Yolo County at the Woodland WTP in late fall continued to at least 9 February (RW+). Very rare in the valley in winter, a **Wilson's Warbler** foraged at north Davis on 14 December—5 February (SCH+) and a **Yellow Warbler** was photographed at the Yolo Bypass W.A. on 28 December (EHx). Although **Northern Waterthrush** is a rare but nearly annual fall vagrant, very few have been found in winter in the valley, so one along Putah Creek downstream from the Hwy 128 bridge from 4-~20 January (JR+) and another at the Colusa NWR from 14 January through February (CA) established the first Yolo/Solano and Colusa County winter records, respectively. Another exciting find was the **Worm-eating Warbler** at Reichmuth Park in Sacramento from 6 January – 16 February (AL+) that established the first documented county record and third for the Central Valley (and first for winter). In Shasta County, a Redding home hosted an adult male **Summer Tanager** on 26-28 February (Jennifer and John Flores, B&CY) where one was seen last April and May. Shockingly, a male **Scarlet Tanager** visited the Sundial Bridge parking lot in Redding on 13 December (GH+) to establish the first Shasta County and first documented Central Valley record as well as the first December record for northern California. The **Orchard Oriole** and a pair of **Hooded Orioles** found in late fall in north Davis were present from 3 to at least 12 December and 22 February, respectively (JDeM+).

A **Black-throated Sparrow** likely wintered at Ceres River Bluff Regional Park in Stanislaus County but was only found on 19-25 February (HR+). **Swamp Sparrows** were reported with one at the Yolo Bypass W.A. on 3 December—24 January (FF+), one at San Luis NWR in Merced County on 14 January (ST) and two along the Tule River in southwest Tulare County on 1-2 February (SDS) along with a **Green-tailed Towhee**. Sutter County had its first **Harris's Sparrow** in many years when one visited bird feeders in a rural area south of Meridian from 25 December—7 January (MF+). Last but not least, an immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was photographed visiting a feeder in Fresno in late January (*fide* GW).

Thanks to Steve Hampton for Yolo County summaries. Other observers: Christopher Adlam, Keith Bailey, Ralph Baker, Brent Campos, Terry Colborn, Julia DeMarines (JdeM), Maurice DeMille, Jon Dunn (JLD), Frank Fogarty, Matt Forster, Eric Haddix (EHx), Steve Hampton (SCH), Ed Harper, Cliff Hawley, Geoffrey Hembold, James Holmes, Logan Kahle, Andrew Lee, Chris Miller,

Roger Muskat, Eric Pilotte (EPi), Ron Pozzi, Harold Reeve, Dominique Roche, William Rockey (WRy), Sal Salerno (SSa), Xavier Sandoval, D. Saxelby (DSx), Ken Schneider, Ian Souza-Cole (IS-C), Mark Stacy (MSy), Steve Summers (SDS), Kirk Swenson (KSw), Jane Taylor, Steve Tucker, Eric VanderWerf (EVW), Bruce Webb (BWb), Dan Williams, Rick Williams, Gary Woods, and Bob and Carol Yutzy (B&CY).

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



Bell's Sparrow (*Artemisiospiza belli*). 19 August 2018. Reichmuth Park, Sacramento Co., California.

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