

## Central Valley Region Bird Highlights: March through May 2010

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A wandering **Cackling Goose** was at the Nevada Avenue ponds on 7 March (MSy) in Kings County where it is rare. Single male **Eurasian Wigeons** lingered along Sutter Ione Road in western Amador County until 20 March (DM, JCS) and at Sailor Bar, Sacramento County, until 24 March (DJo). Another in Tehama County on Lassen Road was clearly a migrant as it was seen only on 26-27 March (MSk, BED). Two male **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** were found with one at Llano Seco NWR, Butte County, on 7-14 April (JR, JHS) and another at Colusa NWR, Colusa County on 8 April (HH). Of great surprise were unseasonal **Surf Scoters**, including a female at the Woodland WTP on 20 April (TEa), one at Kutras Lake on 21 April (DM), and another at the O'Neill Forebay, Merced County on 10 May (PJM, DMO). A **Common Loon** along the Feather River near Yuba City on 1-2 May (JLa+) was one of few Sutter County records. Another **Common Loon** just north of the Kern County line in central Kings County on 2 May (JLk) may be only the second or third county record. The best waterbird find of the season was the immature **Little Blue Heron** in westernmost Mariposa County on 7 May (JSL) for a first county record. Not to be outdone, a flock of 80 **White-faced Ibis** flew by this area minutes later (JSL). A **Brown Pelican** at San Luis Reservoir in Merced County on 28 March (ADeM) may have been present since the previous fall.

The bedraggled but beautiful light morph **Harlan's (Red-tailed) Hawk** was still present west of Davis on 3 March (JCS). An extremely late **Rough-legged Hawk** was photographed flying over Highway 120 in southern San Joaquin County on 25 April (JRu). This arctic-nesting species is very rarely seen in April in California. A **Snowy Plover** at the O'Neill Forebay, Merced County, on 10 May (PJM, DMO) was a rare migrant, as were three at the Fresno WTP on 11 April (GW, PS). One at Llano Seco NWR on 14 April (JHS) was only about the fourth Butte County record. One more was in Placer County at the Lincoln WTP on 17 May (JSL). This species is only regular in the Central Valley at breeding areas in evaporation ponds in the Tulare Basin of Kern and Kings counties. A migrant **Pacific Golden-Plover** was at the Kent Avenue ponds in Kings County on 28 March (JSy), and another was found on 11 April at the Fresno WTP where the species is of less than annual occurrence (GW, PS). Two **Black-necked Stilts** at the Ione WTP on 18-20 May (DM+) may have been looking for a breeding location. This shorebird is still very rare in the foothill region. A few interesting shorebirds were found in Yolo County, including three very early **Marbled Godwits** at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 28 March (JCS), a **Ruddy Turnstone** at the Davis Wetlands on 14 May (TEa+), and a **Sanderling** and a rare spring **Baird's Sandpiper** at the Woodland WTP on 19 May (JCS). Two **Marbled**



Least Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, Yolo Co., on 16 April 2010. Photo © Edward W. Harper

**Godwits** were in rice fields in Sutter County on 1-2 May (JLa+) where this species is rare. More **Ruddy Turnstones** were reported, with two at the Nevada Avenue ponds in Kings County on 7 May (RH) and one there on 9 May (MSy). A **Ruff** at the Kent Avenue ponds on 28 March (JSy) was probably a wintering bird as this species has been found during numerous winters over the past 30 years in Kings County. A spring migrant **Ruff** was at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 21-22 April (TEa). Four **Long-billed Dowitchers** provided one of few county records in westernmost Mariposa County on 7 May (JSL). The only **Franklin's Gull** reports were one from western Tulare County on 16 April (JLk) and four from south-central Kings County on 2 May (JLk). A **Mew Gull** visited the Ione WTP 4-9 March (DM) for a rare Amador County record. Another at the Lodi WTP on 10 March (TB) was closer to the species normal range in the Delta region. Other exciting gull news was the discovery of a nesting colony of **California Gulls** on the levees at the Davis WTP in Yolo County on 21 May (TEa). This is the first nesting record of any gull species in the Central Valley, but is not surprising given the species' population increase and recent breeding in the southern Bay Area. Eight **Common Terns** flying by westernmost Mariposa County on 7 May (JSL) was a first county record. This species is much more expected as a fall migrant in our region. Sixty-seven **Black Terns** at the Woodland WTP on 5 May (JCS) was a high count for Yolo County. Very rare on the valley floor, a **Band-tailed Pigeon** was at Bogg's Slough, Kings County, on 29 April (FrO+). The surge in **Common Ground-Dove** sightings continues with two found east of Bakersfield on 23 March (KL).

Yolo County's overdue first **Vermilion Flycatcher** (a male) evidently wintered at a ranch house northwest of Davis. It was photographed, but word did not get out until twelve days after it had left in mid-March (fide RAD). Winter vagrants of this species routinely reappear the following year, so with a bit of luck it may return to be seen by birders. **Eastern Phoebe** is nearly annually reported during fall and winter in the Central Valley. This winter, one was just east of Bakersfield on 8-16 March (K&BK). The first Central Valley record of a **Yellow-throated Vireo** was a singing male at Horseshoe Pond in eastern Stanislaus County (SSa+). This bird was well seen and photographed by many from 17-18 May. A rare spring **Plumbeous Vireo** was singing and photographed in south Davis, Yolo County on 14 May (JCS, TEa). On 5 May, two **Least Bell's Vireos** were along the Tule River as it enters Lake Success, Tulare County (SDS). Almost expected with the increase in more southerly Central Valley sightings in recent years, a **Least Bell's Vireo** was found singing at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, Yolo County, on 16 April (CrS). A second bird was confirmed the following day (KPa), and a third on 31 May (EW). Two migrant **Bank Swallows** along White Rock Road in western Mariposa County was a great find on 7 May (JSL). **Purple Martins** are rare migrants away from the few known breeding sites in the Sacramento metropolitan area, so six presumed migrants seen at Dinosaur Point on 6 April (PJM, DMO) provided excitement as one of few Merced County records. The **Brown Thrasher** discovered in December was still present near Buena Vista Lake, Kern County, on 2 May (K&BK). Very rare on the valley floor, a **Townsend's Solitaire** was at the Mokelumne Fish



Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*) near Knight's Ferry, Stanislaus Co., on 18 May 2010. Photo © Daniel Lee Brown

Hatchery on 13-16 March (LW+). The biggest surprise of the season was the singing male **Painted Redstart** in Auburn, Placer County. Not only was it one of few ever found in northern California, but it was the first inland record for this region. Found on 16 May, it was seen until the end of May (NT+).

**Indigo Buntings** have been colonizing desert riparian areas westward from New Mexico through Arizona and into southern California. Perhaps as part of this documented range expansion, it is now increasingly reported in the Central Valley and Sierra Nevada (and coastal California as well). (Or perhaps the increase in records in our region is simply a result of increased number of birders!) This year, a singing male was at the Fremont Weir in Yolo County on 31 May (TEa, KvG). **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** have been found nearly annually in the lower elevations of the western Sierra Nevada. This year a male was in Chicago Park, Nevada County, on 21-22 April (RD, EP+). **Green-tailed Towhee** is a rare migrant on the valley floor, and one in Visalia on 18 April (FL) was one of few for lowland Tulare County. Another was along the Tule River, Kings County, along with a **Brewer's Sparrow** on 26 April (SDS). A rare spring **Lark Bunting** was at Turlock Lake in Stanislaus County on 8 May (JH). There are numerous winter records for this species in that general region of the county. A singing **Grasshopper Sparrow** in vernal pool grasslands south of Chico in 12 May (CA) provided one of few Butte County records of this enigmatic species. The **Harris's Sparrow** found in Redding during the winter was still present on 25 March (JCS, MM). Nevada County's first **Hooded Oriole** record was a pair just across from the Yuba County line on 18 May and seen through the end of May (RD+). A **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was at the Lone WTP on 27 April (DM) providing one of few Amador County records.

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