

Central Valley Region Bird Highlights: December 2010 through February 2011

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Five adult and three young **Trumpeter Swans** were in the rice fields of southern Butte County on 11 December – 12 January (JSn, BWb). Merced County is the southernmost part of the normal range for white geese and swans in the valley. In Kings County where white geese are rare, two **Snow Geese** were at the Jersey Ponds on 12 December and three were at Corcoran Ponds in addition to 14 **Ross's Geese** at Utica and 6th Avenue on 8 January (MSy). In the foothills, a juvenile **Snow** and an adult **Ross's Goose** were at Comanche Lake in Amador County from 14 December through the winter (DMr). Barrow's Goldeneye are locally distributed and although found each winter at several traditional sites, they are rare elsewhere. One was in the canal below Turlock Lake on 22 December (fide HR) in Stanislaus County. Always a fun bird to find, a **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** was at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on 29 January (DES, SW). A lingering **Long-tailed Duck** remained in the bay off Benicia on 3 December (the duck stayed through December) along with a **Red-throated Loon** and a first winter male **Black Scoter** (EPi) for a great trio of rare waterbirds for Solano County. Another **Long-tailed Duck** was in the Delta off West Sherman Island Road on 1 December (JHm) for one of few Sacramento County records. The **Brown Pelican** found there in November was seen again on 2 December (JSL).

A **Pacific Loon** at Comanche Lake on 28 February (JCS, JSL, JLx, KPa, FO, DMr+) was in both Amador and Calaveras Counties, as was nearby a **Red-necked Grebe** that was a first Amador County record. Both of these species are rare inland, but have been found nearly annually in large bodies of water in the region. Another **Pacific Loon** was on Folsom Lake on 21 January (BWb) in Placer County. **Red-throated Loon** is even more rare inland than the previous species, so one at Folsom Lake on 11 February (WEH) was an exciting find for Sacramento County. **Common Loons** are rare on the valley floor away from a few traditional locations, so one at Ming Lake in Bakersfield on 1 December (MMcQ) was noteworthy and was joined by three **Horned Grebes** and one **Red-breasted Merganser** (seen again on 29 December). The O'Neill Forebay in Merced County is one of the valley hotspots for **Red-breasted Mergansers** and three there on 6 December (PJM, DMo) was fairly typical. One was found at Laguna West lakes in Elk Grove on 3-8 January (AEn+) for a rare Sacramento County record away from the Delta region.

A **Zone-tailed Hawk** was seen by a fortunate few near Babel Slough in Yolo County on 22 January (RM, MP) and again on 24 January over the Pocket area of Sacramento (AEn, photos of distant bird). This rare species has been increasing in southern California in recent decades and with



Figure 1. Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) near Davis, Yolo County, on 4 December 2010. *Photo by John Sterling*

several coastal records from Monterey to Sonoma counties within the past decade, it seems a likely candidate to be found more often in the Central Valley.

Mountain Plovers are highly local in their Central Valley distribution. A flock of 16 found in southern Sutter County on 4-5 December (TG) was the first record for that county in many decades. A **Snowy Plover** found on 30 December (JH) at Woodward Reservoir in Stanislaus County was unexpected as this species normally winters in the valley only in salt ponds in the Tulare Basin. A rare wintering **Wilson's Phalarope** was at the Jersey Ponds in Kings County on 12 December (MSy). A **Franklin's Gull** near Woodland on 4 December (TEa) was the first winter record locally and perhaps for the Central Valley. **Mew Gulls** are rare away from the Delta and the Sacramento/Yolo County region, so on at the O'Neill Forebay on 6 December (PJM, DMo) was noteworthy. Two were found in Kings County on 12 December (MSy) with one at Corcoran Res. and the other in a flooded field west of 10th Avenue. The second Tulare County record was established by a first-cycle **Mew Gull** at the Toledo Pit ponds on 8 February (SDS). In Amador County, one was at the Ione WTP on 24 December – 15 January (DMr), and another at Comanche Lake on 28 February (JCS, JSL, JLx, KPa, FO, DMr+). One was at Pardee Dam in Calaveras County on 15 January+ (DMr+). Four more below the dam at Black Butte Reservoir on 5 January (JCS, JSL) was an unexpected find in Tehama County. Kutras Lake in Redding, Shasta County, is a regular hotpot for this species, but one was not found there until 18 January (RBr). **Lesser Black-backed Gull** records have been piling up in the past few years. A third-cycle bird was at the

Nimbus Fish Hatchery from 9 January through the end of winter (BG+) to establish the second record from that location in Sacramento County. **Thayer's Gulls** were reported widely throughout the region from Yolo/Sacramento to Kern counties. Along the Feather River at the fish hatchery in Oroville, a first-cycle **Glaucous-winged Gull** joined the crowd on 10 December (JBg) in Butte County. As expected, the Yolo Landfill and Davis WTP had visits from **Glaucous Gulls** with two there on 13 December (SCH). An adult was photographed flying over Sacramento on 1 February (DB). Last but not least was a **Slaty-backed Gull** at the Davis WTP on 5 February (JCS, TEa+ photos) and again on 19 February (TEa, SCH photos). This would be the second record for Yolo County and the valley if accepted by the CBRC.

Stanislaus County's first **White-winged Dove** was along Grayson Road from 2 January through the end of winter (JD+). A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** in Cameron Park on 20 December (SAbb) and another in El Dorado Hills on 26-27 February (MGg+) were great finds for El Dorado County. An immature was near the McConnell State Recreation Area in Merced County on 22 January (ADeM). An adult **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** in Chico on 2 January was a first for Butte County, and that same day a **Red-naped Sapsucker** was found in the same area (both MSk). Both remained for several days. Another **Red-naped Sapsucker** was found at South Shore Comanche Park in Calaveras County on 2 January (JRow) and seen several times later in the month.



Figure 2. Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) near Clarksburg, Yolo County, 4 January 2011. Photo by John Sterling

The **Tropical Kingbird** discovered in Davis during the fall was still present on 31 December (SCH) but could not be refound afterwards. Winter reports of **Western Kingbirds** in California have routinely been rejected in decades past, but there have been several documented records in the past few years in the Central Valley. This year one was near Davis on 4 December (TG, JCS photo). More typical for winter was an **Eastern Phoebe** at the San Luis NWR found in November that remained through the winter (SSa). Another was along the Sacramento River north of Natomas on 26-29 December (DKo+). A third **Eastern Phoebe** was also at the Kern NWR on 11 January - 6 February (MS). A fourth **Eastern Phoebe** near Westley on 2-8 January (JD+) was only the second Stanislaus County record. Another rare but regular winter visitor, two **Vermilion Flycatchers** were found with one at the Visalia Valley Oaks golf course on 6 January through the end of the winter (JLk+) and another at the Tule Elk State Park on 21 February (DMo) in Kern County. The **Steller's Jay** found in Sacramento in the fall was still present on 27 February (DAi). Exceptionally rare in winter in California, a **Warbling Vireo** on Putah Creek upstream of Lake Solano Campground in Solano County on 20 December (RAd) was unexpected. Much more expected, but still rare in winter, a **Cassin's Vireo** was along the Kings River in Fresno County on 26 December (BBr). **Mountain Chickadees** are rare winter visitors to the valley floor, and one was in Sacramento on 21 February (JP). **Sage Thrashers** are rare but regular during winter, but one along the Sacramento River on 4-19 January (GML+) provided one of few recent reports for Yolo County.

It is an understatement to state that it was a slow winter for longspur reports with only a single report of 1-2 **McCown's Longspurs** at County Line Road in Colusa and Yolo counties on 24 January (SCH). A **Black-and-White Warbler** in Bakersfield on 15 December (KL) was the only one reported. The best eastern warbler of the winter was the **Northern Parula** along Lake Ming in Bakersfield on 7 December – 27 February (SDS). Photos proved that this bird was different from the one found on 30 November about a mile away (RAB). More unusual than the previous two eastern species, a male **MacGillvray's Warbler** in south Sacramento on 26 December (CCo) provided one of few winter records for the valley and northern California. Also rare in winter, a **Wilson's Warbler** was at the Sacramento Bufferlands on 19 February (CCo, DKO). **Summer Tanagers** have been found with increasing regularity at all seasons in the valley. One found in Hart Park, Bakersfield in the fall was refound on 15 December (AS). Another was at Roeding Park in Fresno from 30 January to the end of the winter (EE+). The big star of the winter though was the Central Valley's and San Joaquin County's first **Painted Bunting**. An immature male, it visited a backyard feeder in Stockton from 1-7+ February (CP) and was seen and photographed by many. **Lark Buntings** are rare, but regular winter visitors in the Central Valley grasslands. One was near Lake Ming in Bakersfield on 15 December (JW) and another was near Lake Success, Tulare County from 4 January



Figure 3. Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) in Stockton, San Joaquin County, 7 February 2011. *Photo by John Sterling*



Figure 4. Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) near the Gristmill Access, American River Parkway, Sacramento County, 12 February 2011. *Photo by Linda Pittman*

(JLD+) through the end of the winter (along with a **Black-throated Sparrow**). King County's first **Swamp Sparrow** found in November was still present on 3 December at the Hanford WTP (JSy). Another was at the San Luis NWR on 6-30 December (PJM, DMo+) in Merced County. A **Harris's Sparrow** appeared on a backyard along the American River in Sacramento County on 31 January and remained through February (JML). Orioles are rare in the valley during winter. A **Hooded Oriole** in West Sacramento, Yolo County, on 26 December (DMh) and perhaps the same bird was seen on 25 January in Natomas, Sacramento County (DB). There was an influx of **Evening Grosbeaks** through the winter with most records in well-established suburban area with ornamental fruiting trees. Flocks were reported in Chico, Sacramento, Davis and Woodland.

I greatly appreciate the summaries of bird sightings generously provided by Chris Conard (CCo), Steve Hampton (SCH) and Ed Pandolfino (EP). Additional Observers: Steve Abbott (SAbb), Roger Adamson (RAd), Dan Airola (DAi), Bob Barnes (RAB), Jay Bogiatto (JBg), Bev Brock (BBr), Dan Brown, Ray Bruun (RBr), Al DeMartini (ADe), Joe Devine, Jon Dunn (JLD), Todd Easterla (TEa), Andy Engilis Jr. (AEn), Elias Elias, Maureen Geiger, Brian Gilmore, Tim Guida, Ed Harper (WEH), John Harris, Jim Holmes (JHm), Dan Kopp (DKo), Gary Langham (GML), Jeri Langham (JML), Kelli Levinson, John Lockhart (JLk), Jim Lomax (JLx), John Luther (JSL), Don Marsh (DMr), Michael McQuerrey, Ron Melcer, Peter Metropulos (PJM), Darrel Mohr (DMh), Dominik Mosur (DMo), Frances Oliver, Kathy Parker, Michael Perrone, Cheri Pillsbury, Eric Pilotte, James Pompy, Harold Reeve, Jim Rowth (JRow), Sal Salerno (SSa), Don Schmoltd (DES), Jeff Seay (JSy), Alison Sheehey, Mike Skram (MSk), Maggie Smith, Jim Snowden (JSn), Mark Stacy (MSy), John C Sterling (JCS), Steve Summers (SDS), Sally Walters, Bruce Webb (BWb), and John Wilson. Abbreviations used: CBRC = California Bird Records Committee; NWR = National Wildlife Refuge; WTP = Wastewater Treatment Plant.