

Central Valley Bird Highlights: March through May 2011

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A male **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** were found with one at Gray Lodge WA, Butte County, on 7-14 April (JSy). Yolo County's third record of **Tufted Duck** came from a small pond in West Sacramento 11-14 March (JHo). The best waterfowl record of the season was the first year male **Black Scoter** on Kutras Lake, Redding on 14 April through the season (DMr) for the first Shasta County record and only the third record for the Central Valley. This location is also one of the best places in the region to find **Red-breasted Mergansers**, so three there on 31 March (DMr) was not unexpected. Clifton Court Forebay hosted a rare inland **Red-throated Loon** on 2-3 April (ASo) for one of few records for interior Contra Costa and the Delta Region. **Red-necked Grebes** were also found inland with one at the Chico WTP, Butte County on 6 May (JLw+), and another along the American River Parkway in Sacramento County on 5-6 May (DW, CIH). Mather Lake in Sacramento County was home to a **Least Bittern** first found on 13 May (WEH) for perhaps the first time. **Pacific Golden Plovers** are rare, but annual in winter in the Central Valley, but they tend to join **Black-bellied Plover** flocks that are generally found at a few sewage ponds with lots of rip-rap shoreline. One was at the Sacramento WTP on 8 & 22 March (CCo) where this species rarely occurs. Lodi WTP is a regular location for this species, so one there on 2 April (JRo) was not surprising as were the six found at the Woodland WTP on 18 April (SCH). Although 1-3 often winter at that location, this flock of six was likely a migrant flock as it was not associated with the resident wintering **Black-bellied Plovers**. **Snowy Plovers** were once again found at the Yolo Bypass WA on 21 April (AB), with 13 counted on 26 April (WR, SCH). One was at the Cosumnes River Preserve in Sacramento County on 1-4 May (FrO, CIH). Two **Black Oystercatchers** on the edge of the Delta Region along the Benicia waterfront on 23 May (DSw) was the first Solano County record. A Willet was at the Lodi WTP on 2 May (DGY). A **Solitary Sandpiper** was at the Yolo Bypass WA on 25-26 April (DW, WR), on West Butte Road, Sutter County on 24-25 April (JLg, DSk), on Acampo Rd in San Joaquin County on 2 May (DGY), and another in Groveland, Tuolumne County on 3 May (JRi). In Kings County, four **Ruddy Turnstones** in a flooded field near Corcoran Res., on 30 April was a high count with one lingering to 8 May (ADeM), and another at the Jack Stone Ponds on 29 May (both MSy) rounded out the region's reports. A **Red Knot** at the Yolo Bypass WA on 26

April (SCH) was noteworthy as this species is less than annual in the Sacramento Valley, but is annually found in the lower San Joaquin Valley and Tulare Basin. Two were along 10½ Ave in Kings County on 15 May (MSy). **Semipalmated Sandpipers** are rare but regular fall migrants through the region, but are much less prevalent during spring migration, so one at the Tracy WTP on 5 May (TR) was noteworthy for San Joaquin County. Sandy Mush Rd in Merced County hosted a **Stilt Sandpiper** on 3 May (PJM)—always an exciting find in spring in the region.

Folsom Lake was once again home to rare wintering gulls, with an adult **Lesser Black-backed** and a first cycle **Glaucous** on 8 March followed by a second cycle **Lesser Black-backed** and an adult **Glaucous** on 9 March (BWb). The adult was seen again on 12 & 14 March (KPa, JSL+) and perhaps the same bird was at Ancil Hoffman Park in Carmichael, Sacramento County in the morning on 12 March (WEH). A first cycle **Kumlein's Iceland Gull** and a first cycle **Glaucous Gull** were also present on Folsom Lake on 14 March (JSL, TEa+). Other rare gulls were at the Empire Tract along 8 Mile Rd in San Joaquin County with two **Glaucous** on 5 March and a **Kumlein's Iceland Gull** on 13 March (DGY). The top gulls of the season were the second-cycle **Slaty-backed Gull** at the Davis WTP on 21 March (TEa) found there in February and the adult found at the dump near Suisun City, Solano County 6-8 March (RMu, JLx, JSL). The most amazing gull find though was of the flock at the Recology Center on the Stanislaus-San Joaquin County line on West Gaffery Rd (MBu). There were dozens if not hundreds of **Western, Glaucous-winged** and **Thayer's Gulls** present among the swarm of **Herring** and **California Gulls**. This was unprecedented for the Central Valley and these gulls lingered into May. Two first cycle **Glaucous Gulls** were first noted there on 27 March (HMR) with one last seen on 22 April (ADeM), and a first cycle **Kumlein's Iceland Gull** on 28 March (JSL). Locally rare gulls included a first cycle **Glaucous-winged** at Corcoran Res., Kings County on 3 March (SDS), a first cycle **Thayer's** there on 13 March (MSy), a third cycle **Glaucous-winged** at Red Bluff River Park, Tehama County on 11 March (BED), an adult **Western** at the Tracy WTP on 16-18 May (TR).

A low elevation **Great Gray Owl** was spotted in the Donovan Hill WA near Collins Lake in the foothills of Yuba County (DSK). It was in oak woodland but could not be found the following morning. This species has been increasingly documented in lower elevations than expected. Migrant **Black Swifts** are always a treat to find in the lowlands and are often quite unexpected. Two were at Monticello Dam in Solano/Yolo counties during a late storm on 16 May (TEa) as predicted by the observer. A follow up the next day resulted in another one dropping out of the storm clouds to join a flock of foraging swallow (JCS), and another was found during mild weather over hills at 1,800 ft elevation in western Yolo County on 12 May (SBT). As usual, a few spring migrant **Calliope Hummingbirds** were in the lowlands with singles along the

Tule River in Kings County on 30 April (MSy), near Wilton in Sacramento County on 1 May (LP), and another at Liberty Farms in Kings County on 4 May (MSy).

A **Gray Flycatcher** was at Liberty Farms in Kings County on 4 May (MSy). **Least Bell's Vireos** returned to the Yolo Bypass WA on 7 May with two singing males, and an additional male was present on 29 May (EWh). **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** are very rare and local in the foothills and riparian canyons surrounding the Central Valley. One found at Dinosaur Pt. Rd. on the west side of San Luis Reservoir on 5 March (KVV) was perhaps only the second Merced County record. The wintering **Pacific Wren** in Lemoore, Kings County was still present on 31 March (MSy). The **Northern Parula** that wintered at Lake Ming in Bakerfield, Kern County, remained until at least 5 March (ME). **Grasshopper Sparrows** are very locally distributed in the region, and singing male in suitable habitat along South Shingle Rd in western El Dorado County on 22 May (GEw) established one of few county records. A singing **Brewer's Sparrow** was in ranchland in western Yolo County on 11 May (SBT). This species is a regular, but scarce spring migrant on the eastern side of the valley and adjacent foothills, but is much more rare on the western side. The wintering **Harris's Sparrow** along the American River Parkway, Sacramento County was last reported on 14 March (KSw). A second-year male **Scott's Oriole** below Hetch Hetchy Dam in Tuolumne County on 31 May (MtB) was the top find in the foothills this spring. **Evening Grosbeaks** were found on the valley floor this spring, which is unusual for this montane species. Up to thirty were in south Davis, Solano County through 23 May (AK), another ten were seen in Woodland, Yolo County only on 1 March (CL), and two more were in Orangevale, Sacramento County on 14 May (SAbb).

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Abbreviations used:

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