

Central Valley and Foothills Bird Highlights: March through May 2015

*John Sterling, 26 Palm Ave, Woodland, CA 95965
jsterling@wavecable.com*

Very late male **Eurasian Wigeon** were found on 2 May on private property in Kings County (DF) and on 18 May at the Sacramento NWR in Glenn County (BMcM). The first valley record of **Neotropic Cormorant** was at Lake Ming area of Bakersfield 11-23 May (GG+). It was a first record for Kern County and a very exciting find. The species has been moving northward into southern California in recent years so perhaps it was only a matter of time when one would find itself in our region. The adult **Little Blue Heron** that frequented a heron rookery in North Natomas, Sacramento County in spring of 2014 was seen there again on 8 May (SM). A singing **Least Bittern** was at the Cache Creek Conservancy pond in Yolo County on 16 May (BC). This is a new location for this uncommon and local species. Always a surprise inland, a **Brown Pelican** was photographed at Stonegate Pond in West Sacramento, Yolo County. The first **Black Rail** reported in Sacramento County since 2004 was a singing bird at Stone Lakes NWR from 11-27 March (MSw+), where a Least Bittern joined it on 11 March-11 April. Two more singing Black Rails were at the Cosumnes River Preserve in Sacramento County from 23 May into summer (CCo, TR+).

An overdue first for Colusa County was the **Pacific Golden-Plover** found at Colusa NWR on 30 March-5 April (JSL+). Once again the boat launch area on Granite Bay in Placer County section of Folsom Lake was a good spot for migrant shorebirds with a **Snowy Plover** there on 31 March (RPz). Two were also at the O'Neill Forebay in Merced County on 19 April (KVV), and one was at the Modesto WTP in Stanislaus County on 10 May (HMR). One was at Colusa NWR for only the second Colusa County record from 24 April-2 May (JCS+). Thirty-four **Willetts** at the Woodland WTP on 16 April (MSw) was a large flock for Yolo County. A rare spring **Baird's Sandpiper** was at Colusa NWR on 15-24 April with a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** on 24 April (JCS) and a **Marbled Godwit** from 10 April-7 May (JCS). Another **Baird's Sandpiper** was at the Llano Seco Unit in Butte County on 19 April (MRg). Yuba County's first **Ruff** was found in rice fields off Beale Road on 28 April-2 May (JLx+). It was a fancy-plumaged male. Nearby off Ostrom Road, four **Marbled Godwits** and two **Willetts** found in rice fields on 27 April (IG) were rare for Yuba County. Two **Stilt Sandpipers** at the Kent Ave ponds in Kings County on 2-3 May (MSy+) were the only ones reported. A rare spring **Pectoral Sandpiper** and a **Sanderling** were on private property in Kings County on 3 May (MSy, SSt+). A late **Red Knot** was at the Kent Ave Ponds in Kings County on 30 May (MSy) and a late **Marbled Godwit** was at the Fresno WTP on 27 May (EE).

Presumably the same **Gull-billed Tern** that visited private property in spring of 2014 in the Tulare Basin in Kings and Kern counties returned for the spring/summer on 26 April (MSy+) for the valley's second record. Yuba County's first **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was an adult found at the end of Ostrom Road in the landfill on 5-6 March (JLg+), and another adult was at the Granite Bay Launch Ramp Area on the Placer County side of Folsom Lake (RPz) where this species has been found nearly annually in recent years. A migrant **Franklin's Gull** was at Stoil Pond in Tulare County on 19 April (DF), another was on private property in Kings County on 3 May (MSy, SSt+), and three were at Corcoran Res. in Kings County on 29 April (MSy).

The low water level at Camanche Reservoir in Amador/Calaveras counties attracted quite a few shorebird species that are exceptionally rare in those counties including several first county records and record numbers for each species involved. Most of the habitat was in Amador County where the first record of **Snowy Plover** was found with four on 12 April (at least two remaining to 25 April) along with forty **Black-bellied Plovers** and two **Whimbrel** (TEa, FSt, GHg+). The following day three **Bonaparte's Gulls**, three **American Avocets** and one **Dunlin** joined the fray with one remaining **Black-bellied Plover** (JCS, JLx, JSL, JRw) and one male **Red-breasted Merganser** and a flock of 80 **White-faced Ibis** (DM) surpassing the previous high count of three in Amador County and a single ibis was at the nearby lone WTP on 11 May (LP). Lucky birders visiting on 18 April saw a flock of 20 **Long-billed Curlew** and 28 **Whimbrel** flying overhead. On 21 April, a **Marbled Godwit** was found along with eight **Whimbrel** (TEa, DM, JLD). On 26 April, a high count of 9 **Marbled Godwits**, two lingering **Whimbrel**, and a first county record of a **Baird's Sandpiper** were the highlights TEa+). A **Solitary Sandpiper** at the nearby lone WTP on 25 April (TEa+) was another Amador rarity. Three **Wilson's Phalaropes** established another first county record on 7-12 May (TEa+) as did a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** on 7 May (JLD), joined by a second on 8 May (JCS). Two **American Avocets**, two **Dunlin** and two **Long-billed Curlews** remained on 12 May (TSt).

White-winged Doves are increasingly found in the valley but still very rare, so one at a feeder in Tulare on 5 April (DF) was a surprise. **Costa's Hummingbird** is a rare visitor to the region and can appear at any season. A male came to feeders in Rancho Cordova, Sacramento County on 20 April (PB), and two separate yards in Chico with one on 13 May (SKi) and another on 9 May (MRg). A few rare wintering sapsuckers often remain into March, although a **Red-naped Sapsucker** appearing in a backyard in NW Fresno on 21 March (NP) was clearly a migrant. In recent years, the **Vermilion Flycatchers** have been found annually as a rare fall and winter resident (visitor?) in the Central Valley. An adult male was found at the late date of 1-3 March (CHe, CHI+) at Lost Lake in Fresno County. Two **Steller's Jays** on Pass Road on 9-15 March (JCS+) was a rare sighting of this montane species in Sutter County. Another remained from winter at Lodi Lakes in San Joaquin County to at least

12 April (JRw). With the increase in **Bell's Vireo** records in recent years it was only a matter of time for one to be found in Kings County. A singing male was at the corner of 14 ½ Ave and Nevada Ave from 9-31 May (MSy+). Just as exciting was the singing male **Red-eyed Vireo** along Putah Creek near Stevenson Bridge in Solano County on 18 May (AEjr). **Townsend's Solitaires** are montane birds, so one at Nimbus Fish Hatchery in Sacramento County was a surprising find on 16 March (StHu).

One of the best locations for vagrant eastern warblers is the picnic area and boat ramp on the west side of O'Neill Forebay in Merced County. This spring a **Palm Warbler** was seen there from 9 March-2 April (PD+) for the third Merced County record. The first **Indigo Bunting** record for Nevada County was a well-photographed singing male at the Spenceville WA on 30-31 May (JSL+). **Grasshopper Sparrows** are rare, local breeders in the region and their true distribution is poorly known. A singing male on Newville Road north of Black Butte Reservoir on 20 April (TM) was one of few ever found in Tehama County. A **Thick-billed Fox Sparrow** was photographed at Grasslands County Park in Yolo County on 5-19 March (SCH). There are few documented records of this local montane subspecies on the valley floor. The Modesto **Harris's Sparrow** found in winter remained to at least 21 April (*fide* JH) and the Red Bluff bird lingered until 18 March (MSw). A lucky birder chanced upon and photographed a male **Summer Tanager** at the Sacramento NWR on 15 April for one of few records for Glenn County (HH). A rare male **Baltimore Oriole** sang to nearby **Bullock's Orioles** at Westgate Landing Park west of Lodi in San Joaquin County on 15-17 May (P&DC+). Some thought that this bird was a hybrid while others felt that it fit within the range of pure birds. Always unexpected in northern California, a male **Scott's Oriole** was at Lost Lake in Fresno County on 23 May (LP). There are only a handful of records from the western Sierra Nevada—all during spring migration.

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WA=State Wildlife Area; WTP=Wastewater Treatment Ponds; NWR=National Wildlife Refuge; Res.=Reservoir.