

Field Notes

(December 2014-January 2015)

by Bill Bousman

Geese and Ducks

Single **Snow Geese** were seen at Parkway Lakes on 4 Dec (CEd) and the Coyote Reservoir on 6 Jan (CLa, JMD). An immature **Ross's Goose** was found in Shoreline Park on 15 Dec (WGB) and remained in the general area through the end of the period. Seven male **Eurasian Wigeon** were seen on their favored Pond A14 in Alviso on 14 Dec (MMR), and a few remained into January (v.ob.). A male was found in Isabel Valley in the interior of the Diablo Range on 29 Dec (MMR, MJM, NMa), only the second record for the Mt. Hamilton CBC (and Isabel Valley). A male was seen on Coyote Reservoir on 6 and 8 Jan (KPa, MJM). Two were at the South County Regional WasteWater Authority (SCRWA) treatment ponds in Gilroy on 6 Jan (CLa) and singles were there later in January (v.ob.). A single male was again on Almaden Reservoir on 12 Jan (AV). Three **Blue-winged Teal** were seen in the Parkway Lakes on 4 Dec (CEd). Artesian (Mallard) Slough in Alviso continued to be a good place with one to three birds during the period (m.ob.). An adult male was in Pond A14 on 14 Dec (MMR). In the south county, the SCRWA treatment ponds in Gilroy hosted from two to eight birds from 5 Jan (DN) onwards (v.ob.). **Redhead** were found widely in small numbers except for the 380 birds tallied on Pond A18 in Alviso on 23 Dec (MMR). **Ring-necked Ducks** sometimes occur in large numbers. About 100 birds were seen on Almaden Reservoir on 13 Jan (BAM) and the same count was obtained on Grant Lake on 27 Jan (CLa). But imagine the 800+ birds estimated on Coyote Reservoir in January 1999! The long-staying female **White-winged Scoter** on closed refuge ponds was seen again on 14 Dec (MJM, DMcI, DaS, LCr) and 18 Dec (MMR, MJM). The male hybrid **Common X Barrow's Goldeneye** was seen again on the Los Capitancillos percolation ponds on 3-4 Jan (RPa *vide* AV, JPa et al.). One to two female/immature **Barrow's Goldeneyes** were seen on Pond A12 in Alviso on 4 and 14 Dec (WGB, SCR). Another female type was seen on a closed refuge pond on 14 Dec (MJM, DMcI, DaS, LCr). An inland bird on Almaden Reservoir on 11 Jan (BAM) was surprising.

Loons through Shorebirds

Exceptionally heavy rains fell on the Bay area on 11 and 12 Dec. The next day a juvenile **Red-throated Loon** was found in the Los Gatos Creek percolation ponds (KBU). The following day, 14 Dec, was the San Jose CBC and a total of seven Red-throateds were recorded in the Alviso area (m.ob.). Of the seven, most probably left or dispersed as the weather improved. But

one on Pond A16 remained there through at least 18 Jan (m.ob.). A juvenile was found on Shoreline Lake on 19 Dec (GZ) and remained there at least until 28 Jan when two were present (WGB, m.ob.). Birds were also on nearby Pond A1 from at least 23 Dec to 19 Jan, three were counted there on 15 Jan (JStP). Beyond the original inland bird on the Los Gatos Creek percolation ponds, other inland birds were on Calero Reservoir on 27-28 Dec (RCP, MMR), and on the Alamitos percolation pond at the west end of Chynoweth on 30 Dec (JPa). Apparently, all of the storm-strewn birds were juveniles. A juvenile **Pacific Loon** was found on Pond A16 on 16 Dec (WGB, GZ, RWR, CLa) and another on Shoreline Lake on 3 Jan (GZ). The

The Solstice Brought Some Extraordinary Rarities Including a Slaty- Backed Gull, Ovenbird, and the First County Record of Lucy's Warbler

latter bird remained on the lake through the end of the period (m.ob.). A **Common Loon** was found on the Almaden Reservoir on 6 Dec (DN), but left the next morning (EO). Following the storm, at least two Commons were on Pond A4 in Sunnyvale or nearby on 14 Dec (DN, SEM, GZ, SCR) and remained there through 18 Dec (v.ob.). The winter brought two **Red-necked Grebes**, both to inland locations. The first was seen on Coyote Reservoir on 9 Dec (SRs, JLD *vide* SCR) and remained there for the period (m.ob.). The second was found on Calero Reservoir on the Calero-Morgan Hill CBC on 27 Dec (RCP) and stayed only through 6 Jan (m.ob.). The long-staying **Pelagic Cormorant** in the outer Alviso ponds was seen again on 14 Dec (SCR), 14 Jan (WGB), and 18 Jan (MMR et al.). Surprisingly, an immature Pelagic Cormorant was found on Calero Reservoir on 1 Jan (MMR), remaining through 5 Jan (v.ob.). The **American Bittern** wintering in the Mountain View Forebay was seen throughout the period (though often missed). Other bitterns were found on the Pond A11 levee on 14 Dec (SCR) and at Calero Reservoir on 14 Jan (JPa et al.). Four or more **Ferruginous Hawks** have been seen in Coyote Valley during the period, a mixture of adults and juveniles and light morphs and dark morphs (m.ob.). Elsewhere, two Ferruginous were near Calaveras Reservoir on 14 Dec (R&RCo, TO *vide* KHo), one was northeast of Hellyer Avenue on 27 Dec (CLa, BAM, MAA), and one was at Ed Levin CP on 3 Jan (SCR). One or two **Black Rails** were heard

near Alviso Slough, one opposite Pond A12 on 14 Dec (SCR), one farther out the slough on 18 Jan (SEM) and 22 Jan (MJM, SM). High water discouraged wintering **Snowy Plovers** in our part of the South Bay. Nine were in Pond A13 in Alviso on 14 Dec and two more were in Coyote Slough that day (MMR). Twenty birds were found on Pond A13 on 18 Dec (MMR, MJM), but only one was there by 11 Jan (PDU). One-to-two **Lesser Yellowlegs** remained in the section of New Chicago Marsh adjacent to Gold and Elizabeth streets through at least 22 Jan (m.ob.). Single birds were also on Pond A12 on 4 and 14 Dec (WGB, SCR), and in a flooded field southeast of Spreckles and Grand on 14 Dec (SCR). **Sanderlings** were only seen on Pond A13 this winter with a count of 26 on 14 Dec (MMR). Numbers dropped as the water levels rose and only three were there on 18 Jan (MMR et al.). The **Wilson's Phalarope** lingering in New Chicago Marsh next to Gold and Elizabeth streets was found again on 14 Dec (v.ob.) and was last seen on 9 Jan (CLa). **Red Phalaropes** occasionally winter off the central California coast, so we anxiously await winter's storms to see if they will bring these ocean masters ashore. One was on Pond A12 on 14 Dec (SCR, MMR), but was gone by the end of the day. Yet that bird or another was found in Pond A16 on 27 Dec (JL).

Gulls through Wrens

An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was in New Chicago Marsh the morning of 18 Dec (SCR), but could not be found in the afternoon. The big gull surprise for January was the discovery of a **Slaty-backed Gull** at Vasona CP, first seen on 28 Jan and identified on 30 Jan (GZ). My guess is that this large Asian gull was feeding at the Guadalupe Landfill and coming to the Vasona Reservoir to bath in the afternoon. This is the third county record for this rare wintering gull. Our only winter period **Black Skimmer** was a single bird at Charleston Slough on 3 Jan (GZ). The **Greater Roadrunner** in the vicinity of the boat launch area at Coyote Reservoir was seen five times during the period (v.ob.). A single bird was seen northeast of Hellyer Avenue on 20 Dec (CLa) and along Silver Creek Road near Heartland Way on 27 Dec (JB *vide* MMR). Single **Short-eared Owls** were seen on Laguna Avenue in Coyote Valley during the period (v.ob.). A **Vaux's Swift** was observed at Felt Lake on 15 Dec (PDU), only the seventh record for the period November to February. An **Allen's Hummingbird** was found along Summit Road near Loma Prieta on 19 Jan (AMR), nearly a month early. Wintering **Lewis's Woodpeckers** continued to be found in substantial numbers, particularly in the Coyote Valley and near Calero Reservoir (m.ob.). It is worth noting that at least 29 Lewis's were tallied in San Antonio and Isabel valleys on 29 Dec (MMR, MJM, NMa, WGB, RPa) where they are found year round. The puzzle of our rare sapsuckers continued during

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the period. There is no consensus concerning a well photographed sapsucker at Ed Levin CP with characters of both **Yellow-bellied** and **Red-naped**. To confuse the issue, a different sapsucker photographed there on 24 Jan (BAM) was certainly a male **Yellow-bellied**. A female **Red-naped Sapsucker** at Rancho San Antonio OSP 15-29 Dec (JBa, DMe, LSJ, m.ob.) was also controversial, but there the consensus is holding. Photographs of typical male **Red-naped Sapsuckers** were obtained at Rancho Canada del Oro OSP from 16 Dec to 1 Jan (JPa, DF, v.ob.) and Almaden Lake Park from 27 Dec to the end of the period (JC, BT, GMcC, v.ob.). The only **Pileated Woodpecker** during the period was one in Uvas Canyon CP on 21 Dec (SMcH et al.). The Ogier Avenue ponds were good for **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** this period with one-to-two birds there 25 Dec to 1 Jan (MJM, LCr). Two birds were also seen in Morgan Hill on 27 Dec (B&TH). The CBCs provided a good chance to see **Barn Swallows**, this year more common than the expected Tree and Violet-greens. Substantial counts were 30 at the Alviso EEC on 12 Dec (GZ, DN), 10 at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 14 Dec (SEM, GZ, DN), and eight near the Alviso Marina CP that day as well (MMR). Lowland **Red-breasted Nuthatches** continued in low numbers. One was in urban Mountain View 9 & 12 Dec (GZ et al.) and another at the Charleston Road marsh 15 Dec to 19 Jan (MMR, NMa, v.ob.). A **Canyon Wren** was found at the Coyote Reservoir dam on 9 Dec (SRs, JLD *fide* SCR). Two wrens were found the next day (B&TH, RWR) and one or both delighted many through the period. Wintering **House Wrens** included one along the Guadalupe River near the Santa Clara Valley Water District dam on 4 Dec (JPa), at Alamitos and Hicks roads on 1 Jan (JPa), along the San Francisquito Creek Trail on 3 Jan (JL), and at Calero CP on 15 Jan (JPa).

Gnatcatchers through Evening Grosbeaks

Wintering **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** included one to two birds near the Calero Reservoir spillway 27 Dec to 6 Jan (RCP, m.ob.) and one to two birds at the base of the Stile Ranch Trail 27 Dec to the end of the period (GHa, v.ob.). A pair of **American Dippers** were already courting in Los Gatos Creek above the town from 20 Jan to the end of the period (JPa, m.ob.). Four **Mountain Bluebirds** were found on private land in the southeastern county on 8 Jan (SCR). A **Phainopepla** was found along Arroyo Honda on 14 Dec (Pdu, ARy *fide* KHO). A male was seen in Isabel Valley on 29 Dec (MMR, MJM, NMa). A third bird was found along the Canada de Pala Trail in Joseph Grant CP on 3 Jan (CEd). Rounding out these wintering birds was a male on Roop Road 13 Jan to the end of the period (DN, GZ, v.ob.). Curiously, one or more birds have wintered near there since early 2012. An

Ovenbird, apparently on its winter territory, was found on the tree line between power lines and the light industrial area southeast of Charleston Road marsh on 11 Jan (MMR) and has remained during the period (m.ob.). This skulker does not move far from the tree line and only occasionally rewards birder's persistence. The Ovenbird is our first winter record, previous records have been split between late spring and fall. And, if you have the appetite for skulkers, a **Northern Waterthrush** showed up in Charleston Road marsh on 15 Dec (MMR), but heard only. It was finally seen on 19 Jan (JL), but it is a shy bird. This is the 14th year a bird has been found in the marsh. A **Lucy's Warbler** showed up in a gated apartment complex near Ulistac and was photographed there on 29 Dec (SP1 *fide* PDU), a first record for the county. It has not been seen subsequently. A side benefit of the search for this rare warbler was the observation of a wintering **Nashville Warbler** on 31 Jan (SCR), one shows up about one year in two. Much less expected was a wintering **Northern Parula** in the Stanford quad on 15 Dec (RFu et al.). This is our ninth county record and the first for the winter period. The **Yellow Warbler** found in the Palo Alto Baylands in November remained through at least 22 Jan (m.ob.). Wintering **Black-throated Gray Warblers** are slightly more common than Yellows. A 1st-winter female was found in Charleston Road marsh on 15 Dec (MMR, NMa) and has occasionally rewarded Ovenbird searchers at least through 19 Jan (v.ob.). A male was seen in Willow Glen on 29 Jan (BAM). Wintering **Chipping Sparrows** have been found more-or-less regularly in either Jeffrey Fontana or TJ Martin parks during the period with a high count of four on 20 Dec (JPa). The only **Bell's Sparrows** noted during the Mt. Hamilton CBC on 29 Dec (WGB, RPa) were two in the San Antonio Valley. Wintering **Grasshopper Sparrows** included one on the northwestern side of Calero Reservoir 3-6 Jan (SCT, AV, WGB) and another on the Stile Ranch Trail on 20 Jan (MJM). The wintering **Swamp Sparrow** at the Palo Baylands continued through 22 Jan (v.ob.). Another wintering bird was along Alviso Slough below the marina on 14 Dec (SCR). Over the period, 13 **White-throated Sparrows** were found, from Ed Levin CP to Sanborn-Skyline CP, but most have been on the flatlands (m.ob.). Two additional birds were at feeders. A **Western Tanager** was heard again in Mountain View on 22 Dec (MDo). A male was in a Campbell yard on 3 Jan and perhaps the same bird there again on 29 Jan (LMy). A 1st-winter male **Black-headed Grosbeak** was at a Los Altos feeder on 6 and 21 Jan (JT *fide* PDU). A male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was in Halls Valley on 27 Jan (CLa), only our second January record. High winter counts of **Great-tailed Grackles** were 36 on the Ogier Avenue ponds on 27 Dec (KHO, RPa), followed closely by 35 on Lake Cunningham on 14 Dec (JPa *fide* KHO). Presumably, an immature **Bullock's**



Oriole in the vicinity of the Sunnyvale WPCP on 16 Dec (BAM) and 20 Dec (JL), and near the Sunnyvale West Channel on 31 Jan (SCR) were the same overwintering bird. A late report of a male **Cassin's Finch** on the summit of Mt. Hamilton on 5 Nov (EG) was the first since 2008, most records are from November. The high count of **Pine Siskins** in the period was of 100 at Jeffrey Fontana Park on 20 Dec (JPa). The only report of **Lawrence's Goldfinch** was of two in San Antonio Valley on 29 Dec (WGB, RPa). A small invasion of **Evening Grosbeaks** occurred with four to five on Diericx in Mountain View on 17 Dec (JMD, LH). By New Year's Day, they were being found in Sunnyvale on a number of streets with Chinese pistache (Heatherstone, Knickerbocker, Mango, Maranta, etc.). Some high counts included 29 over Diericx on 4 Jan (GZ et al., ViT) and 17 on Mango and Knickerbocker on 11 Jan (DD). There were no reports after 13 Jan.

Observers: Mary Ann Allan (MAA), Jim Barrett (JB), Joyce Bartlett (JBa), Bill Bousman (WGB), Karen Burnson (KBu), Julie Chamberlin (JCh), Rob & Rita Colwell (R&RCO), Lea Crisp (LCr), Mike Danzenbaker (JMD), David Diller (DD), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Jon Dunn (JLD), Pete Dunten (PDU), Craige Edgerton (CEd), Diane Finke (DF), Rob Furrow (RFu), Elinor Gates (EG), Beth & Tom Hamel (B&TH), Garth Harwood (GHa), Kirsten Holmquist (KHO), Lisa Hug (LH), Linda Johnson (LSJ), Caroline Lambert (CLa), Jasen Liu (JL), Nateri Madavan (NMa), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Steve Mammoser (SM), Gini McCreary (JMCC), Steve McHenry (SMcH), David McIntyre (DMcI), Donna Meyer (DMe), Brooke Miller (BAM), Steve Miller (SEM), Lisa Myers (LMy), David Nickerson (DN), Tom Olson (TO), Eric Ongman (EO), Rich Page (RPa), Kathy Parker (KPa), Janna Pauser (JPa), Stephan Pleines (SP1), Bob Power (RCP), Bob Reiling (RWR), Alex Rinkert (AMR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rose (SRs), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Allen Royer (ARy), Dale Stahlecker (DaS), Jason St. Pierre (JStP), Bob Toleno (BT), Jack Tomlin (JT), Vivek Tiwari (ViT), Steve Tracy (SCT), Ann Verdi (AV), and Gena Zolotar (GZ).

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