

Field Notes

(August-September 2015)

by *Pete Dunten*

Geese through Rails

A **Greater White-Fronted Goose**, a sign of the changing of the seasons, was over Los Esteros Rd in Alviso on 27 Sept (LM et al.). A lone **Cackling Goose** was embedded in a flock of 175 Canada Geese over Morgan Hill on 15 Aug (SCR). **Blue-winged Teal**, hard to find in the summer months, were reported at locations along the bay throughout Sept beginning with five on Alviso salt pond A16 on 2 Sept (WGB). Five was the high count near the bay. Away from the bay, one was on Los Gatos Creek in Vasona CP on 4 Sept (JPa, KB) and five were at the Gilroy SCRWA on Sept 25 (SF). A **Red-breasted Merganser**, rare in Aug and Sept, was found on Alviso salt pond A17 on 21 Aug (GZ) and 1 Sept (KG). One was on Salt pond A1 on 10 Sept (SB). On 30 Aug three **Clarke's Grebe** nests, one with eggs, were found near the bay on closed refuge ponds (MJM). The first **American Bittern** of the fall was seen flying over Alviso salt pond A17 on 13 Sept (MDo, GZ). The most visited bayside location this fall has been Alviso salt pond A16 at Don Edwards NWR. On 6 Sept a **Cattle Egret** stopped by for a day (SP, m. ob.). A single **White-faced Ibis** was regularly reported from Alviso salt pond A16 beginning on 6 Aug (NA) and continuing through Sept (m. ob.). Additional reports from Don Edwards NWR included larger groups of 12 on 12 Sept (JSt), 20 on 13 Sept (MSt), 14 on 14 Sept (AMa), 4 on 27 Sept (AMc) and 6 on 30 Sept (MJM, BR). One visited Charleston Slough on 19 Sept (WP) and four were at the Gilroy SCRWA on 25 Sept (SF). A **Swainson's Hawk** near Bloomfield Rd and Frazier Lake Rd at the south end of the county on 2 Aug was the only report during the period (SCR). The first **Ferruginous Hawk** of the fall was sighted at their usual winter haunt along Laguna Ave in Coyote Valley on 24 Sept (DD). The **Black Rails** at the Alviso Marina succeeded in hatching young this year. Three young birds and an adult were seen on 26 Aug (SP) and on 27 Aug two

young with two adults (SP, WGB).

Shorebirds through Alcids

Shorebird migration, off to a good start in July already, brought more rare visitors in Aug and Sept. A Golden-Plover found 27 - 28 Aug at Don Edwards NWR provided a nice identification challenge, with careful study of the tips of the primaries proving it to be a **Pacific Golden-Plover** (BM, RWR, MJM, m. ob.). The third **Pa-**

Late Summer/Early Autumn have been a bird photographer's dream, with sightings of a Semipalmated Sandpiper, a Black Rail and a Blackpoll Warbler.

cific Golden-Plover of the fall was at the Gilroy SCRWA on 28 Aug (SCR). **Snowy Plover** surveyors tallied 61 birds on 23 Aug at Alviso salt pond A13 (MJM, MMR, RJ), and 82 there on 12 Sept (MMR, MJM). **Lesser Yellowlegs** numbers were up from the single birds reported in July to as many as eight on 30 Aug at Don Edwards NWR (MMR). All reports were from locations along the bay. The sole **Solitary Sandpiper** of the fall visited Salt pond AB2 on 22 Aug (MMR, MJM). The number of **Black Turnstones** found, while low, was nonetheless rather extraordinary considering the species

typically does not venture as far south in the bay as Santa Clara county. Two were at the side of a closed refuge pond on 23 Aug (MJM, MMR, RJ), one was at the mouth of Stevens Creek on 24 Aug (RWR, JL), and one was at Alviso salt pond A16 on 13 Sept (LPi). **Ruddy Turnstones** also passed through in Aug, with one at the Stevens Creek mouth on 10 Aug (WGB), one at Alviso salt pond A16 on 30 Aug (DW), and two at Salt pond A17 the same day (MMR). **Semipalmated Sandpipers** did not pass unnoticed amongst all the other peeps this fall, with one at the edge of Alviso Salt pond A12 from 16 - 19 Aug (DW, m. ob.), another at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 25 Aug (MJM), two on Adobe Creek across from Charleston Slough on 26 Aug (MDo), and two at Alviso salt pond A12 on 30 Aug (WBr, JL, MMR). All Aug sightings were of immature birds. A southbound **Pectoral Sandpiper** stopped at Crittenden Marsh on 23 Aug (PDo), two were at Don Edwards NWR on 26 and 27 Aug (FV, MJM, m. ob.) with one there on 29 Aug (JBI, MMR), one was in Mallard Slough adjacent to Salt pond A16 on 12 and 13 Sept (BT, JC, m. ob.), another was over Alviso salt pond A13 on 13 Sept (MMR, MJM), and the latest was seen on the Mountain View Forebay on 26 Sept (MMR et al.). **Baird's Sandpipers**, while expected every fall, were only noted on a few dates beginning on 23 Aug with one each on Alviso salt ponds A12 and A15 (MJM, MMR, RJ), 26 Aug with two at Crittenden Marsh (JL), and 30 Aug with one in New Chicago Marsh (SCR). **Red Knots** were found at bayside locations between 21 Aug and 15 Sept, with a high count of only 12 on 4 Sept at the Stevens Creek mount (FV). The highlight of shorebird migration was an immature **Curlew Sandpiper** found on Alviso salt pond A16 on 11 Sept (WBr) and again on 12 Sept at salt ponds A16 and A17 (m. ob.). This rarity drew many observers to Don Edwards NWR and the search to re-find the Curlew Sandpiper yielded a second, adult bird on 13 Sept in New Chicago Marsh (RCP, JM, m. ob.). An early arriving **Dunlin** was at Don Edwards NWR already on 30 Aug (MMR), and Dunlin easily outnumbered Curlew Sandpipers by mid Sept, frustrating some searchers. A **Stilt Sandpiper**,



*Semipalmated Sandpiper
Photo courtesy Caroline Lambert*

Field Notes *cont'd*

missed in the county in 2013 and 2014, was found at Don Edwards NWR on 25 Aug (GZ, MJM), remaining through 1 Sept (m. ob.). The high count of young birds in the **Caspian Tern** colony on Alviso salt pond A16 was 30 on 13 Aug (WGB). **Elegant Terns** were present throughout the period along the bay, with high counts of 28 on 12 Aug at Salt pond A2E (WGB) and 22 there on 15 Sept (JL). Single **Common Terns** visited Salt pond A2E on 2 Aug (BM), 26 Aug (JL), and 15 Sept (JL), and one was found on closed refuge ponds on 23 Aug (MJM, MMR, RJ). **Least Terns** frequented Salt pond A2E all of Aug, with a high count of only 12, a relatively low number compared to past years, on 18 Aug (JL). They occasionally occur at other locations, and indeed two were found at Alviso salt pond A10 on 23 Aug (MMR, MJM, RJ). **Black Skimmers** remained in the area the first half of Aug, with five, including one young bird, in New Chicago Marsh through 2 Aug (DPe, MJM). Subsequently a pair was seen in the Shoreline Park area from 3 – 9 Aug (m. ob.) and a pair together with a young bird were at the Salt pond A2E/AB2 levee on 12 Aug (WGB). The only Jaeger reported during the period was a **Parasitic Jaeger** harassing Forster's Terns on Salt pond A2E on 13 Sept (WGB). Two disoriented **Common Murres** visited the south bay, one on Alviso Slough opposite Salt pond A9 on 23 Aug (RJ, MJM, MMR) and one oiled bird on Alviso salt ponds A16 and A17 (RWR, m. ob.).

Sapsuckers through Goldfinches

Red-breasted Sapsuckers found at Oak Meadow Park in Los Gatos on 28 Aug (JPa, KB) and Almaden Lake on 12 Sept (JPa) were both early arrivals. **Prairie Falcons** can be found in lowland areas over the winter; one was seen in Coyote Valley along Laguna Ave on 3 and 24 Sept (RWR, DD) and at Coyote Valley OSP on 13 Sept (CMq). The passage of **Willow Flycatchers** through the county on their way south began on 26 Aug (KB) and continued through the period (m. ob.). A **Bank Swallow** was at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 23 Sept (BM); this seems to be a favored location, as migrating swallows roost in the marshes along Gua-

dalupe Slough. Scattered reports of one to two **Red-breasted Nuthatches** away from the Santa Cruz Mountains began on Sept 8 (BM) and continued through the period (m. ob.). A **Sage Thrasher** put in a brief appearance on the Palo Alto Golf Course near the Bay Trail on 23 Sept (DPe, EGo). A day earlier on 22 Sept the first returning **American Pipit** flew over Loma Prieta (AR). Single **Northern Waterthrushes** arrived on 4 Sept along Los Gatos Creek in Vasona CP (JPa, KB) and on 8 Sept along Stevens Creek near Crittenden Lane (CLa). The latter bird may be the same Waterthrush found in Charleston Road Marsh on 15 and 23 Sept (STe, LTe). This is the 15th year the marsh has been the winter home of a Waterthrush. Continuing another streak,



a **Tennessee Warbler** was at Sunnyvale Baylands on 25 Sept (PKe); fall migrants have been found here every year since 2009. **Nashville Warblers** were reported on 7 dates between 9 and 28 Sept (m. ob.). A migrant **MacGillivray's Warbler** at Ulistac NA on 27 Sept (DW) was the only one found during the period. The undoubted highlight of the fall warbler passage was a cooperative **Magnolia Warbler**, the 8th for the county, first noted at Ulistac NA on 18 Sept (RWR). The warbler stayed until 20 Sept (m. ob.) and frequently visited an attractive pool of water at the edge of one of the trails through the park. Rounding out the warblers, one **Blackpoll** was discovered on 14 Sept at Sunnyvale Baylands (PKe, GZ), two were there the next day on 15 Sept (BM, DW, JL, MJM, MDo), and one was found on both 16 Sept (GZ) and 19 Sept (STe, LTe). Seven **Chipping Sparrows** returned to TJ Martin Park in San Jose on 24 Sept (JPa), marking the 9th winter in a row they've wintered in the park. A **Vesper Sparrow** visited the pond near Monte Bello OSP gate 5 on 23 and 25 Sept (GHa). The first Fox Sparrows to arrive were all found

on Loma Prieta, a **Sooty Fox Sparrow** on 4 Sept (AR), and a **Slate-colored Fox Sparrow** and a **Thick-billed Fox Sparrow** both on 22 Sept (AR). The earliest **Lincoln's Sparrow** was one at the Mountain View Forebay on 8 Sept (WGB). Arriving a month early, a **White-crowned Sparrow** was in a yard in Los Gatos on 2 Aug (KB). The Santa Cruz Mountains were the site of another first arrival, a **White-throated Sparrow** west of Gilroy on 19 Sept (JA, AA). Two groups of **Lark Sparrows** along Fortini Rd and San Vicente Ave near the southwestern corner of Santa Teresa CP in Almaden Valley yielded a nice count of 38 birds on 20 Aug (JPa). Fall brought single **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** to the Sunnyvale WPCP on 21 Aug (WGB) and to Laguna Ave in Coyote Valley on 29 Sept (MJM). A group of five **Red Crossbills** at Loma Prieta on 22 Sept were identified as type 3, or Western Hemlock Red Crossbills, by their calls (AR). From one to three **Lawrence's Goldfinches** were found at Almaden Lake on 19 Sept (AV), Anderson dam on 24 Sept (SCR), the pond near Monte Bello OSP gate 5 on 25 Sept (GHa), and along Laguna Ave in Coyote Valley on 26 Sept (JPa).

Observers: Nancy Asquith (NA), Amir Avnit (AA), Julie Avnit (JA), Jeff Bleam (JBI), Will Brooks (WBr), Karen Burnson (KB), Sharon Burton (SB), Juli Chamberlin (JC), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Peggy Don (PDo), Diana Doyle (DD), Shannon Fair (SF), Kevin Gin (KG), Eric Goodill (EGo), Garth Harwood (GHa), Pat Kenny (PKe), Jasen Liu (JL), Aaron Maizlish (AMa), Carlos Marquez (CMq), Amy McDonald (AMc), Brooke Miller (BM), Julio Mulero (JM), Lisa Myers (LM), Janna Pauser (JPa), William Pelletier (WP), Don Pendleton (DPe), Stephen Peterson (SP), Linda Pittman (LPi), Bob Power (RCP), Brad Rangell (BR), Rob Reiling (RWR), Alex Rinkert (AR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Mark Stephenson (MSt), John Sterling (JSt), Linda Terrill (LTe), Scott Terrill (STe), Bob Toleno (BT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Dave Weber (DW), Gena Zolotar (GZ)

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