

Field Notes

(December 2015-January 2016)

by Pete Dunten

Geese through Egrets

Greater White-fronted Geese were found at several locations, though never in high numbers. The high count for the period was four on the Palo Alto Golf Course on 19 Jan (DPe). **Cackling Geese** were also reported from many locations, with the high counts shifting from inland locations during Oct – Nov to bayside spots in Dec – Jan. Salt pond A4 hosted 15 on 6 Dec (BM), Shoreline Park hosted eight on 29 Dec (JL), and New Chicago Marsh had seven on 9 Jan (MMR). Single **Snow Geese** were at Arzino Ranch from 2 Jan to 9 Jan (DDi, m. ob.) and Los Gatos Creek CP from 19 Jan through the end of the period (JV, m. ob.). The bird at Arzino Ranch appeared to have an injured foot. On 24 Jan a Snow Goose with an injured foot was found on the Pioneer High School fields near the Los Capitancillos Ponds (JPa); it remained in that area into February. The first **Ross's Goose** of the winter, an immature, was seen at Sunnyvale WPCP between 1 and 4 Dec (NA, m. ob.). An immature Ross's Goose, quite possibly the same bird, was found at Los Gatos CP on 8 Dec (GHa, BM) where it remained through the period. **Eurasian Wigeons** have an affinity for Alviso salt pond A14, where 18 were tallied on the San Jose CBC on 20 Dec (MMR, SCR). **Barrow's Goldeneyes** turned up at two more locations since the first arrival of a drake on Shoreline Lake in late November. Single females were on a closed refuge pond on 6 Dec (MMR) and Alviso Slough on 17 Dec (WGB), and two females were noted on the closed refuge pond on 20 Dec (SCR). A male **Common x Barrow's Goldeneye** returned to the area for its 9th winter on 21 Nov (JPa) and stayed at the Los Capitancillos Ponds through the period (m. ob.) **Pacific Loons** were noted twice, with one on Alviso salt pond A16 on 18 Dec (GZ, CLa) and one in the channel adjacent to the Bay Trail near Moffett Field on 28 Dec (VH). A **Red-throated Loon** was on Alviso salt pond A16 from 18 Dec to 3 Jan (GZ, CLa, m. ob.). Three **Red-necked Grebes** on Calero Reservoir on 27 Dec were another excellent find by a CBC party (RCP et al.). Two remained through

the period (m. ob.). The two **American Bitterns** reported were both previously found, one at Ogier Ponds seen again on 16 Jan (MJM) and one at the end of Terminal Blvd seen throughout the period (m. ob.). A **Cattle Egret** foraged along Laguna Ave in Coyote Valley between 4 Dec and 12 Dec before moving on (RPh, m. ob.).

Hawks through Sapsuckers

Two **Ferruginous Hawks** continued to be seen in Coyote Valley along Laguna Ave through the period (m. ob.), one light and

CBC parties find some gems, including a Black-throated Sparrow, Red Crossbills, and an Orchard Oriole. A Long-eared Owl was also a winter highlight!

one dark morph. Singles were also found at Calaveras Reservoir on 20 Dec (RiC, RoC, TO), Coyote Ridge OSP on the east side of the valley on 27 Dec (KO, EO), the Sierra Road summit on 28 Dec (eBird), Ed Levin CP on 2 Jan (KP), and Santa Teresa CP on 8 Jan (WGB). The **Black Rails** near the Alviso Marina appear to be year-round residents. One was heard on 20 Dec (MMR, SCR). An unusually high count for January of 118 **Snowy Plovers** was tallied on Alviso salt pond A13 on the 31st of the month during a survey (MMR, MJM, RJ). **Black Oystercatchers** seldom visit the southern end of SF Bay. An exception was one found 12 Jan (VH) and seen again on 29 Jan (PDU) and 30 Jan (MF) from the trail around Salt pond A4. The Oystercatcher was still present on 31 Jan (MMR, MJM, RJ). **Sanderlings** continued to be found at Alviso salt ponds A12 and A13, with a high count of 16 on 31 Jan (MMR, MJM, RJ). Alviso salt pond A16 was the only other location reported, with one Sanderling on 26 Jan (WGB). Yet another nice find by a CBC party was a **Reeve** in New Chicago Marsh on 20 Dec (ST et al.). Not always easy to find, the Reeve remained in the area through 9 Jan (m. ob.). The first **Glaucous Gulls** of the winter weren't noted until 9 Jan, when three were found at

Sobrato High School in Morgan Hill and another was at Ogier Ponds (SCR). Four were at Ogier Ponds on 11 Jan (WGB), where one to two continued to be seen there through 23 Jan (m. ob.) One was at Live Oak High School in Morgan Hill on 23 Jan (SCR). The rarest gull of the winter was a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Ogier Ponds on 16 Jan (SCR). After an absence from the park spanning several years, a **Long-eared Owl** was found roosting in a Pepper Tree at Ed Levin CP on 14 Jan (MJM). The owl stayed through the end of the period, delighting many. One to two **Short-eared Owls** continued to be seen along Laguna Ave in Coyote Valley through the period (m. ob.). The first male **Allen's Hummingbird** of the spring was on its territory along Coyote Creek near Sycamore Drive on 31 Jan (PDU, MMR). Compared to 2014-2015, **Lewis's Woodpeckers** have been scarce this winter west of the Diablo range. One was near the Main Street recharge ponds in Morgan Hill on 27 Dec (THa, BHa). A CBC party on the San Jose count turned up a **Red-naped Sapsucker** at Lake Cunningham Park on 20 Dec (JPa, KB). Not to be outdone, a CBC party on the Calero - Morgan Hill count found a Red-naped Sapsucker near Coyote Creek in Morgan Hill on 27 Dec (BHa, THa). Another was



Long-eared Owl
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Field Notes *cont'd*

seen only once at Ed Levin CP, on 1 Jan (DW). The **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Ed Levin CP continued through the period (m. ob.).

Vireos through Sparrows

Cassin's Vireos have wintered in the county fewer than ten times, hence one found on 11 Jan in Mountain View not far from Shoreline Park was a nice surprise (AR). Single **Barn Swallows** were recorded on the San Jose, Palo Alto, and Calero-Morgan Hill CBCs in late Dec (m. ob.) and one was at Vasona Lake CP on 28 Dec (EO). A **Rock Wren** was found at the Stanford Dish on 5 Dec (WBr), and two were there on 24 Jan (PDU). If the wrens stay and nest, it will be a first for this location. **Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers** wintering at Calaveras Reservoir on 20 Dec (RiC, RoC, TO) and along Los Alamitos Creek on Dec 27 (OA) were nice additions to the San Jose and Calero-Morgan Hill CBCs. A less common winter visitor, a **Townsend's Solitaire** flirted with the county line along the crest of the Santa Cruz Mountains in Long Ridge OSP on 27 Jan (AR). This winter **Phainopeplas** found the hills of Guadalupe Oak Grove Park to their liking. The hills of the park are the last bit of preferred habitat before reaching the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains; *Phainopeplas* seldom winter this far northwest in the county. One was present on 25 Dec (MVe), two on 1 Jan (JPa), and three on 17 Jan (JPa). The **Northern Waterthrush** at Charleston Road Marsh hasn't been easy to find this winter. It was seen again on 17 Jan (MMR). The **Yellow Warbler** wintering near the ranger's residence at Palo Alto Baylands was noted on 8 Dec (AR) and 21 Dec (MMR). Other hardy warblers wintering in the area were single **Black-throated Gray Warblers** along Stevens Creek at Crittenden Lane on 23 Dec (MMR) and on Stanford Campus on 19 Jan (RFu), and a **Hermit Warbler** in the Willow Glen neighborhood of San Jose present through the period (BM). **Clay-colored Sparrows** pass through the county as fall migrants and occasionally winter. A wintering individual was observed bathing in Permanente Creek downstream of Charleston Rd on 20 Jan (AR). The high count of wintering **Chipping Sparrows** at TJ Martin Park in San Jose increased to ten on 10 Jan (RJ). A



Red Crossbill
© Caroline Lambert

Black-throated Sparrow at Santa Teresa CP on 27 Dec (ST) was another standout among the CBC discoveries. The bird remained through 3 Jan (m. ob.). CBC parties found four **Grasshopper Sparrows** on 27 Jan as well, three on Coyote Ridge (KO, EO) and one at San Felipe Ranch (MMR). Another was at Monte Bello OSP along the White Oak Trail on 28 Jan (WGB). Less common Fox Sparrows included a **Slate-colored Fox Sparrow** along the Coyote-Alamitos Canal west of Snell Ave on 14 Jan (JPa) and a **Red Fox Sparrow** along Calabazas Creek downstream of the Bay Trail on 20 Jan (PDU). Two wintering **Swamp Sparrows** were noted at Palo Alto Baylands on 21 Dec (MMR, NM); at least one has been there from 24 Nov through the end of January. Another was found on the Shoreline Golf Links on 1 Dec (AR).

Tanagers through Crossbills

Five **Western Tanagers** overwintered on the Santa Clara Valley floor, with one found in downtown Los Altos on 10 Dec (SSE) and 20 Dec (SZ); one in Mountain View on 21 Dec, 7 Jan, and 10 Jan (GZ); one in south San Jose on 7 Jan (SPv); one in Sunnyvale on 18 Jan (MMR); and one at Oak Meadow Park in Los Gatos on 27 Jan (KP). A **Black-headed Grosbeak** also chose to stay and take advantage of a feeder in a San Jose yard, where it was photographed on 8 Dec (JaJ). Notable numbers of **Tricolored Blackbirds**, estimated at 1500 on 4 Dec (RPh), have been feeding in Coyote Valley along Laguna Ave. An **Orchard Oriole** was found 21 Dec on the Palo Alto CBC at the end of Embarcadero Way (MMR, NM), and it remained through 17 Jan (m. ob.). The Oriole served as an interesting reminder that outside the breeding season the 'expected' species isn't always clear. **Evening Grosbeaks** were

reported from two locations, downtown Los Altos and the Sunnyvale neighborhood around Mango Ave and W Knickerbocker Dr. Sightings in Los Altos fell between 18 Nov and 11 Jan, with the high count of 10 on 11 Jan (AnH). Grosbeaks were first noted in Sunnyvale on 18 Jan (LB) and they continued through the period, with a high count of 17 on 24 Jan (SA). **Red Crossbills** stayed in the area through December; in the Santa Cruz Mountains the high count was 20 at Monte Bello OSP on 1 Dec (CLa), as a backyard bird in Saratoga the high count was 24 on 9 Dec (DC), and over the Willow Glen neighborhood of San Jose the high count was 24 on 30 Dec (BM). They became hard to find in January, with only singles reported on 6 Jan in Willow Glen (BM) and 24 Jan over Loma Prieta (AR).

Observers: Ozzie Altus (OA), Steve Altus (SA), Nancy Asquith (NA), Laurie Bechtler (LB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Will Brooks (WBr), Karen Burnson (KB), Debbie Chase (DC), Rita Colwell (RiC), Rob Colwell (RoC), David Diller (DDi), Pete Duntun (PDU), Mike Feighner (MF), Rob Furrow (RFu), Beth Hamel (BHa), Tom Hamel (THa), Garth Harwood (GHa), Ann Hep (AnH), Victoria Heyse (VH), Richard Jeffers (RJ), Jane Jordan (JaJ), Caroline Lambert (CLa), Jasen Liu (JL), Nateri Madavan (NM), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Brooke Miller (BM), Tom Olson (TO), Eric Ongman (EO), Kurt Ongman (KO), Kathryn Parker (KP), Sergey Pavlov (SPv), Janna Pauser (JPa), Don Pendleton (DPe), Ryan Phillips (RPh), Bob Power (RCP), Alex Rinkert (AR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Stanley Senner (SSE), Steve Tracey (ST), Mark Verdi (MVe), John Villa (JV), Dave Weber (DW), Steve Zamek (SZ), Gina Zolotar (GZ)

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Orchard Oriole
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