

Field Notes

(February-March 2016)

by Pete Dunten

Geese through Hawks

Greater White-fronted Geese remained in the area through 30 Mar, the last date four were reported from locations around the Palo Alto Golf Course (JL). One was at the Coyote Creek Golf Course on the same date (MJM). Congregations of **Cackling Geese** were not as large as in Dec – Jan, and most were found at inland locations. The high counts were five at Vasona Lake CP on 14 Feb (JV), six at Los Capitancillos Ponds and the nearby Deanza Park on many dates through 19 Mar (m. ob.), and nine at Lake Cunningham on 16 Mar (EGi, RGr). The two **Snow Geese** overwintering in the area were seen at several inland locations, though never together, with one lingering until 19 Mar at Los Capitancillos Ponds (MDo). The **Ross's Goose** at Los Gatos Creek CP stayed through 18 Feb (JPa). The high count of **Eurasian Wigeons** dropped compared to the Dec – Jan period, with four noted on 11 Feb at Alviso salt pond A16 (WGB) and four on 22 Feb on a circuit of the Alviso Salt ponds (MHo). One was present in the southern part of the county 28 Mar at the Gilroy SCRWA (MJM). Two rare ducks present this winter continued their stays, a **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** at Charleston Slough through 22 Mar (m. ob.), and a hybrid **Common x Barrow's Goldeneye** at Los Capitancillos Ponds through 15 Feb (m. ob.). The only loon in the county was a new find, a **Red-throated Loon** on Chesbro Reservoir from 9 Feb – 15 Feb (DN, m. ob.). Two **Red-necked Grebes** stayed at Calero Reservoir through 4 Feb (GZ) and another was at Don Edwards NWR on 5 Mar (MSm). Three **American Bitterns** were spotted; one flew into Alviso Slough adjacent to Salt pond A8 on 4 Feb (RWR), one at the end of Terminal Blvd offered views through Mar 15 (m. ob.), and one entertained a SCVAS field trip at Ogier Ponds on 20 Mar (SBe et al.). The first **Swainson's Hawks** of the year on migration were two over Ed Levin CP on 27 Feb (MDo et al.). The pair that has nested in Coyote Valley returned on 29 Mar (RPh) and were seen courting along Bailey Ave. A **Ferruginous Hawk** remained in Coyote Valley through 28 Feb (fide eBird).

Shorebirds through Phainopepla

Snowy Plovers began nesting on Alviso salt ponds A12 (RJ, MJM, MMR) and A13 (WGB) at the end of March. The first date a plover was spotted on a nest was 27 Mar, and the high count on the two ponds was 58 birds on the same date (MMR, RJ, MJM). The **Black Oystercatcher** present in Jan was seen once again on 1 Feb (BM) from the trail around

Salt pond A4. The first **Red-necked Phalaropes** stopping on their way north were three on Alviso salt pond A12 on 27 Mar (MMR, MJM, RJ). Single **Glaucous Gulls** were at Alviso salt pond A16 on 20 Feb (WBr) and 22 Feb (MHo) and at Sobrato HS in Morgan Hill on 5 Mar (SCR). **Caspian Terns** returned in late March, with six at the nesting islands on Alviso salt pond A16 on 27 Mar (MMR) and one at Calero Reservoir on 29 Mar (RPh). In the Charleston Slough/Shoreline Lake area, **Black Skimmer** numbers increased slightly, from one in Jan (WGB, MMR) to two on 23 Feb (MSh) and three on 18 Mar (BSw). Two **Common Poorwills** were heard and then seen at the Santa Teresa Golf Club on 9 Mar (KO). The first male **Rufous Hummingbirds** to arrive on their journey north were singles reported from the Sierra Road summit on 28 Feb (ChJ, LiJ), and from feeders in Los Gatos

Winter Brings a Summer Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak Before Giving Way to Spring

on 1 Mar (KB). A good movement of **Rufous Hummingbirds** occurred on 26 Mar over the Loma Prieta saddle, when 22 (and 36 Rufous/Allen's) were tallied (AR). The lone sighting of a **Lewis's Woodpecker** was along Roop Rd near the entrance to Coyote Lake CP on 26 Mar (RWR et al.). **Red-naped Sapsuckers** were found at two locations, a continuing bird at Lake Cunningham on 7 Feb (JRy) and one at Almaden Lake between 11 Feb and 14 Mar (JPa, m. ob.). The **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**



Red-necked Phalarope
Photo courtesy Tom Grey

at Ed Levin CP, not always easy to find, was present through 24 Mar (RWR). The first of the flycatchers to return was a **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** at J Grant CP on 8 Mar (BM). J Grant CP was the site of the first arrival last year as well. **Cassin's Kingbirds** returned to their favored eucalyptus trees along San Felipe Rd in the southern part of the county, with one noted on 24 Feb (WGB) and two on 27 Feb (BB). They were about a month earlier than the first returning **Western Kingbird** seen 20 Mar at Ogier Ponds (SBe et al.). Single **Cassin's Vireos**, due back in late March, were found at Hidden Villa on 21 Mar (GHa), Chesbro Reservoir on 27 Mar (DN) and in the Willow Glen neighborhood of San Jose the same day (BM). Heard-only reports of early-arriving Cassin's Vireo are hard to evaluate, given the similarity of some vocalizations of Purple Finches. The first **Warbling Vireos** of the spring were along the Guadalupe Creek Trail on 10 Mar (JPa). **Purple Martins** returned to Loma Prieta in late March, with six noted on the 26th (WBr, JL, AR) and seven on the 27th (KO). **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** were first detected on 7 Feb over Lake Cunningham (EGo), and **Cliff Swallows** on 25 Feb over the recharge pond at the end of Chynoweth Ave at the north end of Almaden Valley (JPa). A **House Wren** along Coyote Creek in a rarely visited area of Henry Coe SP on 6 Feb was likely overwintering (JY, AL). Another was along Stevens Creek near Crittenden Lane on 12 Feb (WGB). One of the three overwintering **Phainopeplas** remained at Guadalupe Oak Grove Park through 8 Feb (JPa). Singles were also found at the Stanford Dish on 14 Feb (OA) and in J Grant CP on 20 Mar (ChJ). The Stanford Dish is close to Jasper Ridge, the northernmost location on the peninsula where Phainopeplas have occasionally overwintered.

Warblers through Lawrence's Goldfinch

The secretive **Northern Waterthrush** overwintering at the Charleston Rd marsh was spotted again on 27 Feb (ChJ). In previous years a Waterthrush has stayed at that location into early April. **Black-throated Gray Warblers** have returned; one was singing at Monte Bello OSP on 27 Mar (GHa) and a migrant was at Guadalupe Oak Grove Park on 30 Mar (JoB). The **Hermit Warbler** present through the winter in the Willow Glen neighborhood of San Jose was last seen on 23 Feb (BM) and heard on 27 Feb (MDo). Its regular visits to a feeder through the winter offered a rare opportunity to observe the start of the molt of an immature male into breeding plumage. **Wilson's Warblers** returned on the first day of spring, 19 Mar, when singles were noted at Stevens Creek CP (GZ) and at Los Capitancillos Ponds (MDo et al.). One of the **Swamp Sparrows** overwintering at Palo Alto Baylands showed itself on 5 Feb (MHa) and

Field Notes *cont'd*



Summer Tanager
Photo courtesy Karen Werner

19 Feb (WGB). And while many species are still on winter grounds or migrating, a pair of resident **Dark-eyed Juncos** was already incubating three eggs on 13 Feb in the South Park neighborhood of Santa Clara (KW). The same location hosted a striking immature male **Summer Tanager**, found on 10 Feb and still present on 9 Mar (KW). Single **Western Tanagers**, another of the many species due back at the end of March, were found at Edenvale Park in San Jose on 14 Mar (JPa) and along the Los Gatos Creek Trail north of Los Gatos Creek CP on 20 Mar (BM). The first **Black-headed Grosbeak** to return was at Stevens Creek CP on 19 Mar (GZ). A female **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was seen on one day only, 5 Feb, at Los Capitancillos Ponds (GR). They occur in winter about one year in six. Orioles, brightly colored signs of the turn of the seasons, have returned. The first **Hooded Oriole**

appeared on 29 Feb in the Almaden Valley (JPa), and the first two **Bullock's Orioles** were at Ed Levin CP on 14 Mar (BM). The overwintering **Evening Grosbeaks** in Sunnyvale were last found on 2 Feb, with the high count of the winter, 21 birds, recorded (BM). One was at a new location, a feeder in Almaden Valley, on 3 Feb (JPa). The latest date in downtown Los Altos was 12 Feb, when one Evening Grosbeak was still present (GHa). The first report of **Red Crossbills** from Henry Coe SP since the winter of 2012-2013 was of a flock of 27 on 30 Mar (RPh). Crossbills could be nesting now – reports of breeding are welcome. A flock of 200 **Pine Siskins** at J Grant CP on 12 Mar was a nice count (MDo et al.). **Lawrence's Goldfinches** occurred in small numbers at several locations, two at Henry Coe SP on 6 Feb (JY, AL), one to two at Ed Levin CP on 19 Feb (CD) and 30 Mar (RWR), as many as four along San Felipe Rd between 24 Feb and the end of the period (WGB, m. ob.), two at Coyote Valley OSP on 8 Mar (KO), and four at the Santa Teresa Golf Club on 9 Mar (KO).



Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Photo courtesy Geary Ridings

Observers: Ozzie Altus (OA), Stephen Berlyant (SBe), Bob Bolles (BB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Joan Brauch (JoB), Will Brooks (WBr), Karen Burnson (KB), Chris Daniels (CD), Elizabeth Gibbons (EGi), Eric Goodill (EGo), Rebecca Grieser (RGr), Garth Harwood (GHa), Michael Hawk (MHa), Marcel Holyoak (MHo), Richard Jeffers (RJ), Chris Johnson (ChJ), Lisa Johnson (LiJ), Amy Lauterbach (AL), Jasen Liu (JL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Brooke Miller (BM), David Nickerson (DN), Kurt Ongman (KO), Janna Pauser (JPa), Ryan Phillips (RPh), Rob Reiling (RWR), Geary Ridings (GR), Alex Rinkert (AR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Jennifer Rycenga (JRy), Mike Shafto (MSh), Marc Simmel (MSm), Byron Swift (BSw), John Villa (JV), Karen Werner (KW), James Yurchenco (JY), Gina Zolotar (GZ)

Please send notice of rarities
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AVOCET CORRECTION:
The delightful picture of the Orchard Oriole from our March/April 2016 newsletter issue was unfortunately mis-credited. That picture came from Will Brooks. We appreciate his allowing us to use that picture, and we apologize for the error.