

Field Notes

(April-May 2016)

by Pete Dunten

Geese through Phalaropes

The four Greater White-fronted Geese spending the winter near the Palo Alto Golf Course were last seen on 4 Apr (WGB). Three singles were with Canada Geese in May, one near the bay on 3 May (MSh), one at Anderson Reservoir on 13 May (SCR), and one outside San Martin in Coyote Valley on 19 May (MP). Cackling Geese were last seen in April, when groups of four were at Byxbee Park on the 4th (MDo) and at Lake Cunningham on the 10th (BH, BSw), and a lone bird was along Zanker Rd on 30 Apr (MMR, NM, RJ). The last Snow Goose to depart was last seen at Almaden Lake on 6 Apr (JPa). Small numbers of diving ducks that breed further north are occasionally found over the summer. Three Redheads were spotted on Salt pond A10 through 22 May (AR, MMR, NM, RJ) and one to two were on Alviso salt pond A16 through 22 May (m. ob.). Single female-plumaged Common Goldeneyes were at the marsh west of the Sunnvale WPCP on 3 May (GZ) and on a closed refuge pond and on Alviso salt pond A16 on 22 May (both MMR, RJ, NM). An unexpected Red-breasted Merganser on Alviso salt pond A14 added to a Birdathon team's total on 22 May (MMR, NM, RJ). The only Loon on migration was a Common Loon at Coyote Lake on 10 Apr (JRy, LFI). Late-to-depart Horned Grebes were still on Alviso salt pond A16 on 12 May (AR) and a closed refuge pond on 22 May (MMR, MJM, RJ). Cattle Egret appearances are hard to predict. Two were at Lake Cunningham on 10 Apr (BH, BSw), not far from grazing cattle across S. White Rd bordering the park. Single Swainson's Hawks on migration were over Smith Creek in the Diablo Range on 26 Apr (BM) and Ed Levin CP on 17 May (SSh). Nesting Snowy Plovers on Alviso salt pond A13 had some success, with 4 young birds of 21 total spotted on 22 May (MMR, RJ, MJM). A Ruddy Turnstone, spiffy at this time of year, turned up at Alviso salt pond A16 on 21 Apr (FV) and two flew by Alviso salt pond A12 on 30 Apr (MDa). A Little Stint, only the second found in the county, rewarded careful

Eastern vagrants in May follow a Little Stint in April!

study of the hundreds of peeps in the impoundment between Alviso salt pond A12 and the railroad tracks. First noted on 20 Apr (WBr) and identified on 21 Apr (MI), the Stint stayed through 4 May (m. ob.) and may well have spent the winter in the south bay. The Stint drew many admirers, and the extensive coverage of the peeps yielded a flagged Western Sandpiper on 26 Apr that had been banded near Panama City, Panama on 28 Jan, 2014 (PDu). Another nice find was a Semipalmated Sandpiper photographed on 29 Apr (CF), only the seventh record in the spring and the earliest by three days. Observers looking for the Stint also caught the spring passage of Red Knots at the Alviso salt ponds, two at A17 on 26 Apr (PDu) and one at A12 on 27 Apr (EGo). The first Wilson's Phalarope on its way north was on the Alviso salt ponds on 30 Apr (SCR). Most of the population migrates north via the Central flyway. Fall migration will bring many more Wilson's Phalaropes to the south bay, where they molt before continuing to S. America for the winter.

Swifts through Flycatchers

Black Swifts winged overhead on four dates between 28 Apr when one was over Loma Prieta (AR) and 21 May when eight were over the Coyote Creek Field Station (RJ). Vaux's Swifts returned on 12 Apr with two over Los Capitancillos Ponds (AVe). A local nester was seen entering a chimney near the McAbee entrance to Almaden Quicksilver CP on 2 May (JPa). The first Black-chinned Hummingbird of the spring returned to the Willow Glen neighborhood of San Jose on 1 Apr (BM). The spring passage of Calliope Hummingbirds was presaged by a male at a feeder in Los Gatos on 6 Apr (KB). Six more were seen between 17 Apr and 1 May on Loma Prieta (m. ob.). A late-to-depart Red-breasted Sapsucker was still on the Coyote Valley floor along Llagas Creek on 5 May (SCR). On 27 Apr, a female Pileated Woodpecker was a nice find near the Hunting Hollow entrance to Henry Coe

SP (HA), one of only a handful of records for the park. Returning nesters included an Olive-sided Flycatcher at Loma Prieta on 16 Apr (SMi) and a Western Wood-Pewee at Twin Creeks south of Almaden Reservoir on 15 Apr (JPa). Depending upon how one feels about difficult identification problems, this spring was either fantastic or a nightmare, with four migrant Empidonax species found. Transients passing through on their way north included Willow Flycatcher, Hammond's Flycatcher, and two species rare this far west, Dusky Flycatcher and Gray Flycatcher. Single Willow Flycatchers, typically the latest flycatcher to pass through in the spring, were found



Gray Flycatcher
Lee-Hong Chang

along Llagas Creek near Bloomfield Ave on 20 May (SCR) and at J Grant CP on 21 May (KWn). Hammond's Flycatchers are one of the earlier migrants; one was at Smith Creek on 5 Apr (BM) and four were there on 16 Apr (MMR, MJM, RJ). A Dusky Flycatcher was among the migrants grounded at Ulistac NA on 7 and 8 May (MJM, MMR), the first in the county since the spring of 2011. A record number of Gray Flycatchers visited the county, the first since the spring of 2013, beginning with one along Mallard Slough adjacent to salt pond A16 on 2 May (WGB), another at Sunnyvale Baylands on 4 and 7 May (AR, WBr), and a third at Ulistac NA from 5 to 8 May (GZ, m. ob.). Say's Phoebes were found breeding again this year, with three pair at or near Moffett Field on 3 and 4 May (MMR, SCR) and a single bird along Hellyer Ave between Hwy 101 and Silver Creek Valley Rd on 7 May (AVi). One of the two nests noted at Moffett Field held two young on 3 May (MMR). The first returning Ash-throated Flycatcher was at Monte Bello OSP on 3 Apr (MDo). A surprise find on 20 Apr was

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a Tropical Kingbird at the Sunnyvale Golf Course (AR). Nine of our ten previous records have been in Oct and Nov. A second pair of Cassin's Kingbirds were found nesting in the south county outside Gilroy on 23 Apr (SCR) at the east end of Bloomfield Ave. Cassin's Kingbirds have had a toe-hold in the county since 1997, yet have not nested further north than the lands around Hwy 152.

Vireos through Warblers

A singing Bell's Vireo briefly visited the marsh on private property just east of the Gold St Connector on 23 May but did not stay (RJ). Purple Martins away from the known nesting areas along the crest of the Santa Cruz Mountains included one drinking from Calero Reservoir on 16 Apr (PDu), three over Mount Hamilton on 24 Apr (SMi), and one at J Grant CP on 29 May (BB). A calling Bank Swallow over Morgan Hill on 8 Apr was the only record this spring (SCR). An eastern vagrant, a Tennessee Warbler was vigorously singing between 8 and 11 May at Ulistac NA (ChJ, DW, BM, m. ob.). Only 3 of the last 25 records of Tennessee Warbler have been in the spring. It was among the nice collection of migrants at Ulistac NA waiting for favorable weather to move on, which included a Nashville Warbler between 6 and 8 May (ChJ, m. ob.), a MacGillivray's Warbler on 5 and 7 May (GZ, RJ, MMR), a Hermit Warbler between 6 and 11 May (PDu, m. ob.), a hybrid Hermit x Townsend's Warbler on 14 May (KG), and a Yellow-breasted Chat between 7 and 9 May (DPe, m. ob.). Nashville Warblers moved through the area between 4 Apr (GZ) and 15 May (SFo), with a high count of three at Smith Creek on both 16 Apr (RJ, MJM, MMR) and 26 Apr (BM). MacGillivray's Warblers were noted on five dates between 16 Apr (MMR, MJM, RJ) and 26 May (WGB), with a high count of two on 16 Apr at Smith Creek. Hermit Warblers, all singles, began passing through on migration at Smith Creek on 23 Apr (ChJ, LiJ), with the last detected at Ulistac NA on 18 May (SFo). The immature male Hermit Warbler that spent the winter in the Willow Glen neighborhood of San Jose resurfaced on 11 and 12 Apr (BM). Up along the Skyline Trail in Sanborn-

Skyline CP, three were singing on 9 May in an area they're known to nest (GHa). The first Yellow-breasted Chat making its voice heard was along Llagas Creek downstream from Bloomfield Ave on private land on 23 Apr; a vocal Chat was there again on 20 May (both SCR). Upstream of Bloomfield Ave at the Gilroy SCRWA two Chats were found on 3 May (RWR). Singles were at Alamitos Creek near Leland HS on 28 Apr (JPa), J Grant CP on 1 May (AME), and Sunnvale Baylands on 4 May (AR). Three were found at J Grant CP on 21 May (KWn), bringing the total number of Chats up to nine individuals. The latest reports were of one at J Grant CP on 24 and 29 May (ChJ, BB). Other warblers of note were the first-of-spring Yellow Warbler on 9 Apr along the Alamitos Creek trail (JPa), a Palm Warbler on 6 Apr at the Sunnvale Golf Course (AR), and two Audubon's Yellow-rumped Warblers in suitable nesting habitat on 30 May along the Skyline Trail in Sanborn-Skyline CP (WGB).

Sparrows through Goldfinches

While Black-chinned Sparrows have been tantalizingly close to the county line near Loma Prieta in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the territories are all in Santa Cruz county. On the east side of the county, a survey of the interior of Henry Coe SP in the Diablo Range yielded seven Black-chinned Sparrows on 15 May (MMR). Seven White-throated Sparrows at six locations stayed into April, and another lingered to 3 May along the Permanente Creek Trail near Charleston Road (AR). Ulistac NA hosted a male Painted Bunting, an eastern vagrant that is our third record and first in the spring, from 8 to 10 May (RL, m.



Painted Bunting
Raymond Liao

ob.). There may have been more rarities at Ulistac NA in the second week of May than anywhere else in N. California! Lazuli Buntings returned for the summer, with the first noted at Santa Teresa CP on 7 Apr (GZ, DN). A Yellow-headed Blackbird visited the Sunnyvale WPCP on 9 Apr (BW, SPa). Red Crossbills continued to be widely reported through the period, with the highest counts at Monte Bello OSP (94 on 16 May and 180 on 22 May (both GHa)) and at Lexington Reservoir (50 on 8 Apr (AR)). Fewer were found in the Diablo Range, where the high counts were six at the Hunting Hollow entrance to Henry Coe SP on 23 Apr (MDo et al.) and two at Smith Creek on 26 Apr (BM). The last large groups of Pine Siskins were a flock of 250 at Monte Bello OSP on 9 Apr (DPe) and 150 at Mount Hamilton on 22 Apr (EGa). Lawrence's Goldfinches remained scarce, with only five reports from the eastern part of the county and one report from Loma Prieta, totaling thirteen finches.

Observers: Heather Ambler (HA), Bob Bolles (BB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Will Brooks (WBr), Karen Burnson (KB), Mike Danzenbaker (MDa), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Pete Dunten (PDu), Al Eisner (AME), Leslie Flint (LFl), Sharon Forsyth (SFo), Craig Fosdick (CF), Elinor Gates (EGa), Kevin Gin (KG), Eric Goodill (EGo), Garth Harwood (GHa), Bob Hirt (BH), Marshall Iliff (MI), Richard Jeffers (RJ), Chris Johnson (ChJ), Lisa Johnson (LiJ), Raymond Liao (RL), Nateri Madavan (NM), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Brooke Miller (BM), Steve Miller (SMi), David Nickerson (DN), Michael Park (MP), Steven Patt (SPa), Janna Pauser (JPa), Don Pendleton (DPe), Rob Reiling (RWR), Alex Rinkert (AR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Jennifer Rycenga (JRy), Mike Shafto (MSh), Sachindev Shenoy (SSh), Byron Swift (BSw), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AVe), Alie Victorine (AVi), Bill Walker (BW), Dave Weber (DW), Kathryn Wendel (KWn), Gina Zolotar (GZ)

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