

THE WINTER SEASON

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Northern California



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Warm sea surface temperatures continued from fall, reducing nearshore ocean productivity. This may have resulted in the presence of starving Brown Pelicans around Monterey Bay and a large die-off of Cassin's Auklets all along the coast. These warm waters were certainly responsible for high Black-vented Shearwater numbers; late-lingering Heermann's Gulls, Brown Pelicans, and Elegant Terns; the continued push of Brown Boobies; and the largest incursion of Royal Terns in recent times.

Warm water offshore gave us at least a glimmer of hope for relief from California's lengthy drought, and December rainfall was above average. However, in January, a month that typically supplies more than a fifth of our annual total, most of the Region saw not a drop of rain. Sub-normal precipitation in February assured us of another year of drought.

The highlight of the season was an adult male Common Scoter, a first for North America outside of Greenland. A Rustic Bunting stayed through the period and provided the state with its fifth record. The irruptions first noted in fall of Band-tailed Pigeons, Lewis's Woodpeckers, Steller's Jays, and Varied Thrushes into areas where they are generally uncommon or rare continued through winter (see S.A.).

Abbreviations: C.B.R.C. (California B.R.C.); C.R.P. (Cosumnes River Preserve, *Sacramento*); C.V. (Central Valley); F.I. (Southeast Farallon Island, *San Francisco*); H.R.S. (Hayward R.S., *Alameda*); Point Blue (Point Blue Conservation Science); P.R.N.S. (Point Reyes National Seashore, *Marin*), S.F. (San Francisco, not State Forest); Reports of exceptional vagrants submit-

ted without documentation are not published. Documentation of C.B.R.C. review species will be forwarded to Tom Benson, Secretary, secretary@californiabirds.org.

WATERFOWL THROUGH PELICANS

Two Brant were deep inside S.F. Bay at H.R.S. 1 Feb (RJR). This species is more regular farther n. in the Bay at Brooks Island, *Contra Costa*, but a tally of 110+ there 8 Feb (Tony Brake) was exceptional. Trumpeter Swans were well reported, with an ad. and a juv. at the Chico W.T.P., *Butte* 10-24 Jan (ph. KnS, ph. MRg, ph. Bruce Mast), perhaps the same 2 birds later along Pennington Rd., *Sutter* 24 Jan (ph. Bruce Mast), and 6 below Fall River Cemetery (third *Shasta* record; ph. DMr). Three Tundra Swans at Bass Lake 13 Feb (Nina Jones) provided only the fourth record for *Madera*. The only Bewick's Swan reported was near Nelson, *Butte* 14 Dec (JHS).

The returning **Falcated Duck** continued at Colusa N.W.R., *Colusa* through 17 Feb (Pat Bachetti). Blue-winged Teal were numerous at Bridgeway Island Pond, *Yolo* throughout the season, and 84 carefully counted 25 Jan was a very high tally for the Region (Kirk Swenson). Eurasian Teal were found at Arcata Marsh, *Humboldt* 23 Dec (Deven Karmmerichs-Berke), Ferndale Bottoms, *Humboldt* 19-27 Feb (CDu, RbF, m.ob.), C.R.P. 29 Jan (ph. Cory Gregory), and Pescadero Marsh, *San Mateo* 4 Feb (Donna Pomeroy). Male Tufted Ducks were reported from Lake Earl, *Del Norte* 14 Jan (JLD, †WEH, Dan Tankersly), Stafford Lake, *Marin* 20 Jan–27 Feb (DSg, ph. Alex Merritt, m.ob.), Lake Hennessey, *Napa* 30 Jan–21 Mar (Alex Greene, ph. DeH, DvH, m.ob.), and Modesto W.T.P. 4 Jan (second for *Stanislaus*; ph. JHG).

The 2 male White-winged Scoters continued at Fall River Lake, *Shasta* through 22 Dec (ph. B&CY), with one remaining through 5 Jan (Michael & Muriel Plank). The long-staying female White-winged Scoter at Alviso, *Santa Clara* was last seen 18 Dec (MMR). The Richmond, *Contra Costa* Black Scoter was last reported 27 Jan (Albert Linkowski). The find of the season was an ad. male **Common Scoter** at Crescent City Harbor, *Del Norte* 25 Jan–13 Feb (ph. Bill Bouton, ph. m.ob.). This bird provided the first North American record outside of Greenland and was seen by hundreds of people who made the trek to the nw. corner of our Region. Besides the Truckee, *Nevada* Long-tailed Duck that continued through 9 Dec (Bill Frey), 3 others were found well inland: singles at Eastman Lake, *Shasta* 17 Dec (fide Frank Sanderson), Black Butte Forebay, *Tehama* 4-7 Jan (ph. MRg, m.ob.), and n. Lake Tahoe, *Placer* 7-14 Feb (ScD, WRi, RPz). Other notable Long-tailed closer to the coast included singles at Benicia, *Solano* (RMu), American River Parkway 31 Dec (third *Sacra-*

mento record; ph. GEw, ph. CrS, m.ob.), Martinez, *Contra Costa* 1 Jan (Jeff Hoppes, Catherine Spaulding et al.), and Miller/Knox R.S., *Contra Costa* 8 Feb (LKh, ph. m.ob.). Providing one of few records for *Merced*, an ad. male Barrow's Goldeneye was at O'Neill Forebay 9 Feb (ph. KVV). An apparent Hooded Merganser x Bufflehead was at Crescent City Harbor, *Del Norte* 14-28 Feb (Jeff Harding, ph. Julio Morelo, Sky Lloyd). Several Red-breasted Mergansers were again found far inland, with singles near Truckee, *Nevada* 13 Dec (MMy), at Stampede Reservoir 27-29 Dec (second record for *Sierra*; SRs, DRs, JSL, JLa), at Thermalito Forebay, *Butte* 1 Jan (Andy Tomaselli), and at Lake-of-the-Pines, *Nevada* 10-23 Jan (KSp, m.ob.). Eight more inland Red-breasted Mergansers were reported closer to the coast in *Lake, Napa, Yolo, Sacramento*, and *San Joaquin* through 17 Feb (m.ob.).

Among 9 Red-throated Loons and 4 Pacific Loons inland, the most noteworthy were *Merced's* fourth Red-throated at O'Neill Forebay 14 Jan (ph. KVV) and a Pacific on Crowley Lake, *Mono* on the late date of 20 Dec (KWe). A count of 8000 southbound Pacifics at Ocean Beach, *S.F.* 2 Jan (RyT) signified a late migrant push. More difficult to explain was the sudden appearance of 800 Pied-billed Grebes at Lake Earl, *Del Norte* 15 Jan (RbF, RHw), as they had not been present the previous day. This count also bests our previous record of 560. A Red-necked Grebe at Stampede Reservoir 26 Dec–18 Jan (Tim Lenz, ph. CPD, m.ob.) was a first for *Sierra*. Laysan Albatrosses are rarely seen from shore, so one at Point Pinos, *Monterey* 17-18 Dec (†BLS, †DR, CSc, RC et al.), accompanying Black-footed Albatrosses at fishing boats, was remarkable. Similarly, shearwaters seldom venture far inside S.F. Bay, making a Sooty/Short-tailed Shearwater seen from Alameda, *Alameda* 3 Dec (RJR) particularly noteworthy. Fall's incursion of Black-vented Shearwaters persisted. The high count was of 10,700 from Año Nuevo Point, *San Mateo* to Waddell Creek S.B., *Santa Cruz* 30 Dec (PJM). Even more unusual were the numbers farther north. Up to 17 seen from Ocean Beach 30 Dec+ (PP, HuC, m.ob.) were the first seen from mainland S.F. in more than a decade, and counts of 525 at Bodega Head, *Sonoma* 4-9 Jan (DN, ScC) and 700+ at Gualala, *Mendocino* 2 Jan (JRW) were exceptional for these counties. *Humboldt* records included 2 off Humboldt Bay 4 Jan (†RbF, †JCS) and 3 there 8 Jan (JuB, Devin Bosler), and one made it as far n. as the Klamath River mouth, *Del Norte* 10 Jan (†LuB). A Blue-footed Booby at Terrace Point 10 Feb (†AJ) provided the only *Santa Cruz* record outside the 2013 invasion. The Brown Booby parade that began in fall continued. Individuals of all ages and sexes were recorded at F.I. through the period, with a high of 11 on 23 Feb (Point Blue)

eclipsing the Islands' previous high of 3 from 2006; one was even observed displaying with the continuing **Northern Gannet** in early Feb! Others included 2 in *Monterey*, 2 in *San Mateo*, one in *S.F.*, 4 in *Marin*, and 1-2 far to the n. near the Smith River mouth, *Del Norte* 16 Dec (Casey Ryan). Two American White Pelicans at Crowley Lake, *Mono* 20 Dec (DHo) were very late for that location; one standing on ice 10 Jan (DHo) obviously lingered too long. By 20 Feb, the lake was hosting its first northbound migrants (110 birds; Steve Brad).

HERONS THROUGH TERNS

The Least Bittern at Foothill R.P., *Sonoma* continued through 8 Jan (DgSh). The only coastal Cattle Egrets reported to us were one-day birds at Struve Slough, *Santa Cruz* 15 Feb (NAd) and Ferndale Bottoms, *Humboldt* 18 Feb (ph. Elizabeth Feucht), but many more reports (e.g., of up to 51 birds in *Sonoma*) were submitted to eBird. White-faced Ibis were numerous coastally, with the first for the Centerville to King Salmon C.B.C., *Humboldt* found 4 Jan (†GSL) and up to 24 in *Santa Cruz* and up to 36 in *Monterey* in Dec and early Jan (m.ob.). A **Black Vulture** at Bolinas 29 Jan+ (first *Marin* record; ph. DSg, m.ob.) may have been the same individual seen in the fall in *Sonoma*. Notable White-tailed Kites included up to 3 at the Ash Creek W.A., *Lassen* 10-20 Dec (Curtis Marantz, JLD, KAb, DRs, SRs) and 2 in Sierra Valley, *Plumas* 17 Dec (Terry & Jerry Williams). A pair of Bald Eagles nesting at Rank Island 27 Dec (JSy) provided the first *Fresno* nesting record for the C.V. floor. *Sonoma's* **Common Black Hawk** was seen again 4-10 Jan (DgSh, m.ob.) at Laguna de Santa Rosa; it has been mostly resident there since at least 2005. A late Swainson's Hawk was over downtown *S.F.* 5 Dec (HuC); another at the Colusa N.W.R., *Colusa* 6 Dec (†Brooke Miller et al.) was also away from the known wintering population in the Sacramento–San Joaquin River Delta. Seven Harlan's Hawks in six counties included light-morph birds in *Yolo* 30 Jan (SCH) and *San Joaquin* 22 Jan–25 Feb (DGY). The Smith River Bottoms Sandhill Crane found last season continued through the period (seventh *Del Norte* record; LBr, m.ob.). Three records from *Humboldt* 15 Dec–27 Jan (one involving 2 birds) were likewise notable.

A Pacific Golden-Plover at Tulare W.T.P., *Tulare* 6-16 Jan (ph. DaF et al.) was unexpected. Up to 54 Mountain Plovers were found along County Line Rd., *Yolo/Colusa* 29 Jan–16 Feb (CKf, ph. SCH et al.); 5 more were found 6 km farther n. in *Colusa* along White Rd. 21 Feb (Linda Angerer). The only coastal bird was at the Eel River mouth, *Humboldt* 20-25 Jan (ph. SMcA, Brad Elvert, TMcK, DFX). Wintering Solitary Sandpipers were found at two locations: along the Napa

River in downtown Napa, *Napa* 19 Jan–18 Mar (Jason Celaya, ph. MBe, MKU, m.ob.) and along Rd. 208 5 km nw. of Millerton Lake 11 Feb–7 Mar (ph. Nina Jones, m.ob.). Although the latter provided the first winter record for *Madera*, reports from this location a year earlier 18-20 Nov 2013 and 13 Mar 2014 suggest a returning wintering individual. The only Ruff reported spent 14 Feb–22 Mar at Pixley N.W.R., *Tulare* (Jim Moore, ph. Steve Turley, ph. SDS, m.ob.). The Alviso Wilson's Phalarope reported last season remained through 9 Jan (ph. Caroline Lambert), providing the fourth winter record for *Santa Clara*. December storms pushed Red Phalaropes inland to Alviso, *Santa Clara* 14 Dec (†SCR, †MMR) and 27 Dec (Jasen Liu) and to the Willits W.T.P., *Mendocino* 18 Dec (CEV, ph. SJS).

A Pigeon Guillemot at Point Arena, *Mendocino* 3 Jan (GEC, CEV) provided a rare Jan record for this species, which winters n. of the Region. Continuing warm water was likely responsible for *San Mateo's* second winter record of Scripps's Murrelet, with 4 off Half Moon Bay 21 Feb (AJ, RSTh et al.); in *Monterey*, 2 were seen from Point Pinos 25 Dec (DR, RC), and one was on Monterey Bay 22 Feb (ShJ). Ancient Murrelets continued in good numbers, with a high of 75 at Moss Beach, *San Mateo* 14 Dec (RSTh). Completely unexpected was a moribund Ancient Murrelet found on a road in Quincy 7 Dec (Christina Caires; ph. Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care), a first for *Plumas*. The Region has previous inland records only from *Contra Costa*, *Mono*, and *Shasta*. Apparently owing to a dearth of food, large numbers of Cassin's Auklets were found dead around Monterey Bay and in coastal *Humboldt*. Horned Puffins seen from shore included one at Pomponio S.B., *San Mateo* 3 Jan (ADeM), and at Point Pinos, *Monterey*, singles on 20 and 30 Dec and 2 on 21 Dec (CSc, DR, Chris Wood, PFW).

A total of 390 Bonaparte's Gulls at Eagle Lake, *Lassen* 18 Dec (FRH) provided a high count for this location, especially so late in the year. Franklin's Gulls were represented by 3 in coastal *Humboldt* as late as 5 Jan (m.ob.), one in the Smith River Bottoms, *Del Norte* 16 Dec (TKz, Casey Ryan), and 2 at Corcoran Reservoir, *Kings* 20 Dec (MSy). Notable inland Mew Gulls included singles at Folsom Lake, *Placer* 7-11 Feb (Donald Pendleton, RPz), *Colusa* N.W.R. 11 Feb (*Colusa's* second; †Oscar Canino), and Lucerne Harbor, *Lake* 19 Feb+ (JRW et al.), as well as 3 at Lake Almanor, *Plumas* 17 Feb (ph. DVP, LHa). A Western Gull at Folsom Lake, *Placer* 1 Feb (LKh, ClH) was noteworthy so far inland. Counts of 795 California Gulls at Crowley Lake, *Mono* 20 Dec and 338 still present 27 Dec (JLD) were high for late December. Most gull species are hard to come by in *Nevada*, so 2 Herring Gulls at Boca Reservoir 26-27 Dec (Tim Lenz, SRs, DRs) were significant. Of a number of Iceland Gulls reported, the most

compelling was an ad. showing the features of the nominate subspecies at the Nimbus Fish Hatchery 2 Jan (ph. Cory Gregory, Ashley Casey), a first *Sacramento* record (p.a.). Other well-documented reports included a first-cycle bird at Clear Lake, *Lake* 27-29 Dec (ph. Steve Stump), 2 first-cycle birds at the Teapot Dome Landfill, *Tulare* 9-10 Jan (†JLD, ph. †SDS), and different first-cycle birds s. of San Jose, *Santa Clara* 18 & 22 Feb (ph. SCH, ph. RWR). However, some of these birds possessed features similar to others that have not been accepted by the C.B.R.C. due to concerns about faded Thayer's Gulls or variability within Thayer's. Lesser Black-backed Gulls were at Alviso, *Santa Clara* 18 Dec (ph. SCR), Crowley Lake, *Mono* 27 Dec (JLD, R&NO; likely a returning bird from the previous winter), the Teapot Dome Landfill, *Tulare* 21 Jan (ph. SDS), and H.R.S. 22 Jan (RJR).

A third-cycle Slaty-backed Gull reported at the Salmon Creek mouth 6 Dec (†Tony Briggs) would be *Sonoma's* third (p.a.); an ad. at Los Gatos 28 Jan–2 Feb (ph. Gena Zolotar, ph. MJM, WGB et al.) furnished *Santa Clara's* third record. Glaucous-winged Gulls at Redding, *Shasta* 8 Dec (FrT) and Black Butte Reservoir, *Tehama* 4-10 Jan (ph. Mary Muchowski et al.) were in the n. C.V., where rare. Twenty-three Glaucous Gulls represented an average showing; 7 of these were in the C.V., where the species is regular in small numbers. A late Black Tern at Bolinas Lagoon, *Marin* 4 Dec (Mark Dettling et al.) and an early Caspian Tern at H.R.S. 26 Feb (RJR) represented extremes on opposite legs of the migratory cycle, while a Common Tern at Arcata Marsh, *Humboldt* 22 Dec–4 Feb (EE) provided a rare winter record. Royal Terns staged their largest influx in a half-century or more, albeit a brief one. During the period 31 Jan–5 Feb, 20 birds were recorded in *Monterey* from its s. border to Point Pinos (†SDS, †SBT, †LTer, †MiR, ph. BHL, ph. PFW, ph. DR, Todd Wills), with a high of 10 at the Willow Creek picnic area 1 Feb (†MiR). One at Moss Beach 2 Feb (RSTh) was part of this influx and provided the first *San Mateo* record since 1999. Thereafter, the incursion fizzled, and the only subsequent report was of one at Point Pinos, *Monterey* 1 Mar (ph. Shawn Waggoner). A few Elegant Terns lingered along the coast from *Del Norte* southward; the latest was at s. Humboldt Bay, *Humboldt* 18 Jan (MWa). The only Black Skimmers outside S.F. Bay were 3 at Moss Landing, *Monterey* 17-23 Feb (ph. Rachel Perpignani et al.).

PIGEONS THROUGH WARBLERS

The major incursion of Band-tailed Pigeons that began in fall continued through winter, with a high count of 4779 on the *Santa Cruz* C.B.C. 20 Dec (m.ob.), a total 852% over the recent 10-year average for that count, and the first records for the C.V. floor in *Fresno*, with a peak count

SA From fall through winter and continuing into early spring, the Region saw concurrent low-land irruptions of Band-tailed Pigeon, Lewis's Woodpecker, Steller's Jay, and Varied Thrush that were unprecedented based on available historical data. This phenomenon is well illustrated by data from the C.V., where Band-tailed Pigeons and Steller's Jays are generally absent and the relative abundance of Lewis's Woodpeckers and Varied Thrushes can vary dramatically from winter to winter. Figure 1 uses eBird data from C.V. counties whose boundaries are largely restricted to the valley floor (*Kings, Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, Stanislaus, Sutter, and Yolo*) to compare frequency of inclusion in eBird checklists from the fall 2014–spring 2015 period to the average frequency for the previous 14 years. In each case, the data show a pattern of most frequent reports in late fall and early winter, with each species continuing to be reported at a frequency far exceeding the historical average well into early spring.

Data from C.V. Christmas Bird Count circles since 1978 allow us to put the magnitude of these irruptions into historical context. Band-tailed Pigeons were present this winter at an abundance (based on birds/party hour) five times higher than the long-term average and at the second highest level from this period. Lewis's Woodpecker abundance set a new record and was nearly three times the long-term average. Steller's Jays were recorded at a level six times the average and twice the previous high. Varied Thrush abundance also set a new high and was eight times the long-term average.

The irruptions of Band-tailed Pigeons and Varied Thrushes were particularly widespread, with the pigeons present in remarkable abundance in coastal Southern California and Varied Thrushes in unprecedented numbers throughout most the state.

The causes of this year's phenomenon are unknown, but it is worth noting that all four of these species rely to some extent on acorns for food in fall and winter. According to Walt Koenig (<http://www.nbb.cornell.edu/wkoenig/wicker/CalAcornSurvey.html>), 2014 was among the poorest years for acorn production in California, so perhaps low acorn availability was at least partially responsible for the irruptions of some or all of these species. However, some oak species produced good or near-average acorn crops in some areas (e.g., valley oaks and blue oaks in the C.V. and Sierra foothills), and many or most of these birds (especially in the case of Varied Thrush) likely originated outside California. Furthermore, review of C.B.C. data since 1978 indicates that irruptions by these species are not necessarily synchronous, so that factors other than acorn production likely drive these species' irruptions.

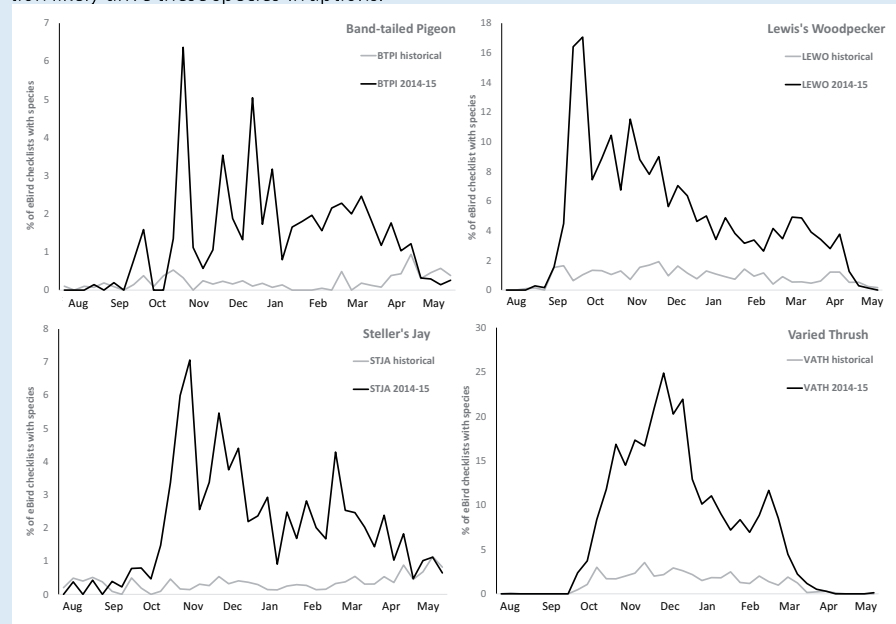


Figure 1. eBird data from Central Valley counties comparing the percent of checklists reporting each species from fall 2014 through spring 2015 to prior years (2000–2013).

there of 50–60 on 1 Jan (George Folsom). *Mendocino's* first Common Ground-Dove visited the Ukiah W.T.P. 14 Dec (SJS, †Rich Howard, DAJ, ph. DAB). Three White-winged Doves included singles at Pescadero, *San Mateo* 23 Nov+ (GrH, ADeM, ph. DMO), s. Arcata Bottoms, *Humboldt* 18 Dec–5 Jan (Annie Meyer, m.ob.), and Crowley Lake, *Mono* 20 Dec+ (Steve Brad, m.ob.). Establishing the fourth record for *Stanislaus*, a Northern Saw-whet Owl called repeatedly from Grayson Rd. 4 Jan (†HMR, John Vixie). Vaux's Swifts are scarce in winter; the only birds reported were one at Felt Lake 15 Dec during the Palo Alto C.B.C. (the third in winter for *Santa Clara*; PDU) and 2 at H.R.S. 27 Feb (RJR).

The invasion of Lewis's Woodpeckers into portions of the Coast Range and C.V. that began in fall continued through winter. *Santa Clara* recorded its highest number of winter sightings away from areas of residency (110) since careful recordkeeping began in 1993, with a nearly 70% increase over the previous high count of 65 during the winter of 2003–2004 (WGB); 3 found during the Benicia C.B.C., *Solano* 15 Dec (Karen Sheldon, Sandi Hewitt) were the first documented on that count since 1978. Following the fall irruption of Acorn Woodpeckers, *S.F.* had its first occurrence of multiple wintering birds in many years, with a high count of 54 tallied on the *S.F.* C.B.C. 30 Dec (m.ob.). *Sonoma's* second Williamson's Sapsucker, a female, was at Santa Rosa 29 Jan–4 Feb (SMcA, m.ob.). Although the species may prove to be resident in the remote ne. portion of *Trinity*, a bird in that area at Scott Mountain Summit Campground 7 Dec (FrT) established the first winter record for the county. A total of 23 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers was average and included *Shasta's* second about 2 km se. of McArthur 21 Dec–21 Jan (JLD, DRs, SRs, m.ob.). Numbers of Red-naped Sapsuckers appear to be increasing in the Region away from areas of residency. This winter's total of 31 established a new high count and was more than twice the long-term seasonal average. An imm. Crested Caracara near Harkins Slough 6 Jan (ph. Jon Ford) established the third record for *Santa Cruz*. The same bird was thought possibly to have been responsible for reports in *Monterey* in fall and then in *San Mateo* at Half Moon Bay 10–28 Feb (ph. Andrew Rush, ph. PJM, m.ob.).

Seven *Empidonax* flycatchers were reported. They included 2 Hammond's, one each in *Yolo* and *Sacramento*; one Least, along the Salt River, *Humboldt* 4 Jan (†GSL), a first for the Centerville to King Salmon C.B.C.; and 4 Western (presumably Pacific-slope)—2 in *Butte*, one in *Sacramento*, and one in *Santa Cruz*. An Eastern Phoebe that spent its fourth consecutive winter along Stage Rd., *San Ma-*

teo, 14 Nov–8 Mar (RSTh, m.ob.) was the only one reported. *Merced* hosted our only Vermilion Flycatchers, with 2 continuing from fall—a female on lower Santa Fe Grade Rd. through 13 Jan (ph. KVV), another female at Merced N.W.R. through 17 Feb (m.ob.), and a male at the Grasslands W.A. near Los Banos 30 Dec–13 Jan (Greg Gerstenberg, ph. KVV). An Ash-throated Flycatcher at Arcata, *Humboldt* 31 Jan (Dominic DiMauro) furnished a rare winter record for the Region.

Among the 15 Tropical Kingbirds reported was the first for *Tulare* at the Tulare W.T.P. 4–18 Jan (JLT, ph. SDS). The single Western Kingbird reported, at the Aptos Creek mouth 3 Jan+ (ph. Randy Wardle, Shirley Murphy, m.ob.), provided the third winter record for *Santa Cruz*. Our only Scissor-tailed Flycatcher visited Half Moon Bay 24 Nov–6 Dec (ph. Tim Sullivan et al.), establishing the second Dec record for *San Mateo*.

Our southernmost Northern Shrike was along Rancho Tehama Rd., *Tehama* 26 Nov–6 Jan (DJK, m.ob.). Our only Plumbeous Vireo spent its fourth consecutive winter at San Lorenzo Park, *Santa Cruz* 20 Dec–5 Feb (CSZ, DvS, m.ob.). Five Cassin's Vireos included 2 inland and 3 coastal. Warbling Vireos included 2 at Golden Gate Park 5 Dec (Russ Bright) and one at H.R.S. 14 Feb (RJR). The Steller's Jay irruption noted in fall diminished in winter, with small numbers lingering in portions of the n. C.V., where the species is normally scarce to absent (BED). The Blue Jay at Willow Creek, *Humboldt* continued through 7 Jan (COG). Single out-of-place Clark's Nutcrackers appeared at Mount Saint Helena 15 Jan (*Napa's* second) and Hood Mountain R.P., *Sonoma* 22 Jan (both DgSh).

Unseasonable swallows included single Cliffs at Yolo Bypass W.A., *Yolo* 27 Dec (MPe) and Sacramento Regional W.T.P., *Sacramento* 30 Dec (Steve Scott) and 14 Dec/Jan reports of Barns, many involving multiple birds. After 12 years of no detections, the tenuous and mercurial population of Mountain Chickadees at Cone Peak, *Monterey* was rediscovered 18–19 Jan, with 1–2 birds reported each day (MSy, JSL). Three Chestnut-backed Chickadees at Los Banos Creek Reservoir 29 Dec (ph. RMu) provided one of few records for *Merced* and the first there to be photographically documented. Fourteen reports of Townsend's Solitaires away from areas of residency included *Solano's* fifth, with a single bird at Gates Canyon Rd. 5 Jan (Ashley Casey, Cory Gregory, m.ob.), and a high count of 40–50 on Mount Saint Helena, *Sonoma* 22 Jan–16 Feb (DN, ESH, m.ob.). A Swainson's Thrush at Bo-



Swainson's Thrush is reported nearly every winter in Northern California, but such reports are rarely verifiable. This Swainson's Thrush at Bolinas, Marin County 27 December 2014 was one of the few reported ever to be adequately documented. Photograph by Peter Pyle.

linas, *Marin* 27 Dec (ph. PP) found during the Southern Marin County C.B.C. provided one of few substantiated winter records for the Region. Varied Thrushes continued to be reported in large numbers through much of the Region, with a high count of 1015 in *Santa Cruz* during the *Santa Cruz* C.B.C. 20 Dec (fide EFe), a total more than four times the recent 10-year average.

This season was exceptional for the complete lack of notable mimic reports. It's a rare winter that we don't get at least one Gray Catbird or out-of-range thrasher. Longspurs were also scarce, with one Lapland Longspur at H.R.S. 3–16 Dec (RJR), 6 at three locations in *Humboldt* 6 Dec–28 Feb (TKz, Jared Hughey, Axl, m.ob.), and one on FI. 17–18 Dec (Point Blue). Up to 6 Chestnut-collared Longspurs were on Bear River Ridge, *Humboldt* 31 Jan–24 Feb (Jared Hughey, m.ob.). Our only McCown's Longspur report was a heard-only bird along County Line Rd., *Colusa* 18 Feb (JCS).

A secretive Ovenbird was at Mountain View, *Santa Clara* 11 Jan+ (ph. MMR, ph. m.ob.). A total of 7 Northern Waterthrushes was nearly double our average, and 15 Black-and-white Warblers also made an above-average total. Tennessee Warblers were at Belmont, *San Mateo* 20 Dec–7 Feb (RSTh, LBT) and at the U.C. Arboretum, *Santa Cruz* 14 Jan–10 Feb (JGa). We often miss Lucy's Warbler, so singles at *Santa Clara* 29 Dec (first *Santa Clara* record; ph. Stephan Pleines, fide PDU) and Bodega Bay, *Sonoma* 15 Jan+ (DFr, m.ob.) made for a good showing. Twenty-three Nashville Warblers was a typical tally. A MacGillivray's Warbler s. of McKinleyville 2–26 Dec (GSL) provided *Humboldt* its second or third winter record, and a Hooded Warbler at Natural Bridges S.B. 13 Jan–16 Feb (Jack Mazza, ph. m.ob.) was the second individual to winter in *Santa Cruz* (the other bird having spent two consecutive winters in the late 1990s). A Northern Parula first found in fall near Basso Bridge, *Stanislaus* (JHG, m.ob.) continued through 3 Jan (Xavier Sandoval, Sergio Pineda), providing a first winter record for that county. Likewise, a Northern Parula at Stanford University 15 Dec (RFu, Joyce Wong, Sophie Christel) also provided *Santa Clara* its first winter record. Our only Blackburnian Warbler was at Half Moon Bay, *San Mateo* 21 Dec (ph. Donna Pomeroy). Eight Yellow Warblers were all in coastal counties. A Black-throated Blue Warbler was at Lee Vining, *Mono* 10 Dec (Paul McFarland, m.ob.). Black-throated Blues were also at Smith River 10 Jan–15 Feb (Terry Allaway, ADB, m.ob.; second for *Del Norte*) and Los Gatos, *Santa Clara* 9–16 Feb (Marty Sidor, ph. m.ob.). A total of 26

Palm Warblers was right on our average. A Prairie Warbler in the Presidio 1 Dec–1 Jan (PSar, m.ob.) marked the second or third winter record for *S.F.* Five Hermit Warblers were all in coastal counties, as were all 9 of our Wilson's Warblers.

SPARROWS THROUGH FINCHES

A Green-tailed Towhee in Fall River Mills 11 Dec (Boyd & Cathy Turner) provided a winter first for *Shasta*. Green-tailed Towhees were also at Flatiron Marsh, *Solano* 19 Dec–4 Jan (DRs, SRs, JCS et al.) and at the U.C. Farm, *Santa Cruz* 20 Dec–25 Feb (J.J. Mack, RRa, BRa, m.ob.). For the first time since 2000–2001, no winter American Tree Sparrows were reported. Five Clay-colored Sparrows represented a typical showing. A Black-throated Sparrow at Pixley N.W.R., *Tulare* 21 Feb (Alison Sheehy et al.) was an excellent C.V. find. Four Lark Buntings included one along Tim Bell Rd., *Stanislaus* 20 Dec (JHr, Sandi Schoeppe) and another along Robinson Rd., *Solano* 10 Feb (Noah Reid et al.). Two others were fall holdovers: one along Higgins Canyon Rd., *San Mateo* 18 Dec (RSTh et al.) and the other along Tehama Ave., *Kings* 23 Jan (MSy). A Le Conte's Sparrow was at Abbotts Lagoon, *Marin* 20 Dec–24 Jan (Wendy Dreskin, SBT, RyT, ph. Ken Schneider). Nelson's Sparrows included as many as 2 at Moonglow Dairy, *Monterey* 3 Jan+ (RF, ph. DR, m.ob.) and a lone bird at Arrowhead Marsh, *Alameda* 20 Jan (Scott Bowers). The precise winter range of Thick-billed Fox Sparrows (*Passerella iliaca megarhyncha*) remains uncertain, but the impressive numbers (e.g., up to 10 along one 6-km transect) of this taxon reported from the upper elevations of the s. Santa Cruz Mountains, *Santa Cruz* and Santa Lucia Mountains, *Monterey* this season suggest these rarely birded areas may represent regular wintering locations. Forty-two Swamp Sparrows was a bit over our average tally, but a dozen Harris's Sparrows was double our average total. A long-staying and generally cooperative **Rustic Bunting** was in Golden Gate Park 6 Dec+ (ASH, m.ob.), providing *S.F.* its first, the Region its fourth, and the state its fifth record.

Eight Summer Tanagers were all in coastal counties, a total more than twice our long-term



The Northern California region has hosted four of the state's five Rustic Buntings. This bird was at Golden Gate Park from 6 (here 13) December 2014 through the end of the winter period, affording many birders excellent studies. Photograph by Ed Harper.

average. Sixteen Western Tanagers provided a typical total for the Region; however, 5 at William Land Park, *Sacramento* 17 Dec+ (LJE, m.ob.) was remarkable for a single locality. Only 2 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were reported, one s. of McKinleyville, *Humboldt* 1 Dec (RbF et al.) and another at Santa Rosa, *Sonoma* 14 Dec–11 Jan (Debbie Dressler). Nine Black-headed Grosbeaks made a good total but fell short of last winter's record of 13. An injured Blue Grosbeak found on River Rd., *Monterey* 6 Jan (ph. Jessica Shipman) expired at the local SPCA office but not before providing a first winter record for that county and a rare winter record for the Region. A Rusty Blackbird at Glenshire 25 Jan–1 Feb (Greg Hemig, m.ob.) provided a first record for *Nevada*. Three of 4 Orchard Orioles were in *S.F.*, all 15 Bullock's Orioles were coastal, and Baltimore Orioles were at Lafayette Park, *S.F.* 2 Dec–2 Feb (Richard Bradus) and San Mateo, *San Mateo* 14 Dec–24 Jan (ADeM). A **Brambling** continued from fall at Arcata, *Humboldt* through the season (RbF, m.ob.).

Corrigenda: In the winter 2013-2014 report, for the record of the Lucy's Warbler in *S.F.* 23-24 Dec, Mark W. Eaton is credited as having taken a photograph, but Michael Park should have received that credit.

Cited observers (county subregional editors in boldface): Many more observers are not specifically cited; all are appreciated. **Ken Able** (Las-

sen), Nanci Adams, Alan D. Barron, Leonie Batkin, Dave A. Bengston, **Murray Berner** (*Napa*), Justin Bosler, **William G. Bousman** (*Santa Clara*), Steve Brad, Lucas Brug, Scott Carey, Rita Carratello, George E. Chaniot, **Daryl Coldren** (*Humboldt* and *Del Norte*), **Chris Conard** (*Sacramento*), Hugh Cotter, **Rudy C. Darling** (*Nevada*), **Jeff N. Davis** (*Madera*), Al DeMartini, **Bruce E. Deuel** (n. C.V. counties), Scott Dietrich, **Colin P. Dillingham** (*Plumas* and *Sierra*), Cedric Duhalde, Jon L. Dunn, Pete Dunten, Leo J. Edson, Elias Elias, Gil C. Ewing, Dane Fagundes, Paul Fenwick, Eric Feuss, David Fix, Rick Fournier, **Rob Fowler** (RbF; *Humboldt* and *Del Norte*), Dea Freid, Rob Furrow, James H. Gain, John Garrett, **Steve Gerow** (*Santa Cruz*), Frank R. Hall, David Hamilton, Denise Hamilton, Steve C. Hampton, W. Edward Harper, **John Harris** (*Stanislaus*), Lauren Harter, Garth Harwood, Cliff Hawley, Rob Hewitt, Bill Hill, Alan S. Hopkins, Debbie House, Eugene S. Hunn, **John E. Hunter** (*Trinity*), Alvaro Jaramillo, David A. Jensen, **Logan Kahle** (*Contra Costa*), **Robert J. Keiffer** (*Mendocino*), Clay Kempf, Mark Kudrav, Tony Kurz, Alexandra Lamb, Gary S. Lester, **Robin L. C. Leong** (*Solano*), John Lockhart, Jim Lomax, John S. Luther, Michael J. Mammoser, Don Marsh, **Dan J. Maxwell** (*Marin*), Sean McAllister, Tristan McKee, **Peter J. Metropulos** (*San Mateo*), **Dominik Mosur** (*San Francisco*), Roger Muskat, Martin Meyers, Dan Nelson, **Kristie N. Nelson** (*Mono*), Chet Ogan, **Frances Oliver** (*San Joaquin*), Ron & Nancy Overholtz, Ed

Pandolfino (*Placer*), **Gary W. Potter** (*Fresno*), Ron Pozzi, Peter Pyle, Bernadette Ramer, Robert Ramer, Harold M. Reeve, Robert W. Reiling, Will Richardson, **Robert J. Richmond** (*Alameda*), Michael Rieser, **Don Roberson** (*Monterey*), Michael M. Rogers (MMR), Michael Rogner (MRg), Diane Rose, Steve Rose, Stephen C. Rottenborn, **Ruth A. Rudesill** (*Sonoma*), Paul Saraceni, Ken Schneider, Christian Schwarz, Cooper Scolan, **Jeff Seay** (*Kings*), Doug Shaw, David Sidle, Daniel Singer, Jim H. Snowden, Shearwater Journeys, Kevin Spencer, Mark Stacy, **John C. Sterling** (*Modoc*, *Alpine*, *Calaveras*, and *Yolo*), **Tim Steurer** (*El Dorado* and *Amador*), Steve J. Stump, Brian L. Sullivan, **Steven D. Summers** (*Tulare*), Craig Swolgaard, Linda Terrill, Ryan Terrill, Scott B. Terrill, Ronald S. Thorn, **Jim Tietz** (F.I.), Francis Toldi, **Steve Umland** (*Tuolumne*), Chuck E. Vaughn, **Kent Van Vuren** (*Merced*), David Vander Pluym, Matt Wachs, Ken Wells, **Jerry R. White** (*Lake*), David G. Yee, **Bob & Carol Yutzky** (*Shasta*). ☺

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Southern California



Guy McCaskie
Kimball L. Garrett

The Region's ongoing drought continued through the winter; although a few storms deposited rain in December and January, temperatures climbed higher than average and precipitation dipped well below aver-

age as the winter progressed. A historic invasion of Varied Thrushes, first noted late in fall, continued through the winter season. Significant rarities were few, with a Roseate Spoonbill at the south end of the Salton Sea after 10 January being California's first in seven years and the returning wintering Gray Hawk at Carpinteria being noteworthy.

Abbreviations: C.L. (China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, extreme ne. *Kern*); E.A.F.B. (Edwards A.F.B., se. *Kern*); F.C.R. (Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley N.P., *Inyo*); N.E.S.S. (n. end of the Salton Sea, *Riverside*); P.M.N.A.S. (Point Mugu Naval Air Station, *Ventura*); S.E.S.S. (s. end of the Salton Sea, *Imperial*); S.J.W.A. (San Jacinto W.A., near Lakeview, *Riverside*); V.A.F.B. (Vandenberg A.F.B., nw. *Santa Barbara*). Museum collections abbreviated in the text are: LACM (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County) and SDNHM (San Diego Natural History Museum). Because most rarities in s. Cali-

fornia are seen by multiple observers, only the observer(s) initially finding and/or identifying the bird are included. Documentation for species on the California B.R.C. (C.B.R.C.) review list (see www.californiabirds.org) is forwarded to the C.B.R.C. and archived at the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology in Camarillo.

WATERFOWL THROUGH GULLS

Seven **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** were at the S.J.W.A. 3-7 Jan, with 3 shot by hunters 3 Jan and 4 photographed on 4 Jan (RM); this species formerly nested at multiple locations throughout the s. half of California, but was restricted to S.E.S.S. by the 1970s and is now only a casual to accidental straggler in the state. A flock of 82 Tundra Swans on Tinemaha Reservoir, *Inyo* 26 Dec (C&RH) was the largest number reported in the Region; 2 at F.C.R. 1 Jan (SLH) were at an unexpected location, and single birds around Pico Rivera/South El Monte, *Los Angeles* 23 Dec–16 Mar (DD) and another at the