

MIDDLE PACIFIC COAST REGION
/Rich Stallcup and Jon Winter

This, the driest winter in decades, formally qualified as a drought. Many waterfowl never arrived in their usual winter strongholds but remained on open water to the north. Many of the birds which did arrive were killed or weakened by botulism and cholera caused by stagnating water. Waders were concentrated at permanent seepages as occasional ponds went dry. Vernal pools for the most part never appeared.

Again, because of mild weather many summer and eastern passerines remained and provided some first regional records. Others were produced by waterbirds. The Mottled Petrel was, this season added to the regional and California state lists.

LOONS THROUGH STORM-PETRELS — Five Yellow-billed Loons were reported Dec. 20 - Jan. 25, which is high (m.ob.). An Arctic Loon was still present at Redding Jan. 3 and a Red-throated was a L. Hennessey Dec. 7 - Mar. 13 (WS,BDP). Both species are rare inland as is the Red-necked Grebe, one of which was seen in



breeding plumage on Topaz L. Mar. 13 (JD,PU). Numbers were higher than average along the coast. Horned Grebes continue to be common inland and 49 were reported there. Western Grebes were in very high numbers at usual coastal locations. At Los Banos, 340 Pied-billed Grebes on one pond was an incredibly high concentration Jan. 25 (LCB, B&CY). Five Laysan Albatrosses; one from the Eel R. canyon Jan. 18, one off Monterey in early December and up to three at the Cordelle Banks in January and February seems high, but as winter pelagic trips increase we may find them more regularly. Northern Fulmars were very numerous at sea throughout the period, with dark birds outnumbering white by about 13:1. The P.R.B.O. Beached Bird Survey (below B.B.S.) reported heaviest dieoffs during the last week of March with 14 dead birds per km. of beach from Pt. Reyes south but considerably fewer to the north. A **Mottled (Scaled) Petrel** *Pterodroma inexpectata* was picked up dead on Pt. Reyes Beach Feb. 25 by BM and AR. The skin is deposited at the Calif. Academy of Sciences and is the first record for California (B.B.S.). A Pink-footed Shearwater was seen on Monterey Bay Feb. 15 (C.F.O.). The species is rare in winter. First winter records of Buller's Shearwaters were received for one Dec. 14 on Monterey Bay (PK) and an aberrant, beached individual at Marina Feb. 25 (B.B.S.). Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters were reported throughout the winter. Five Short-tailed were the most on any one trip but ten beached dead birds were picked up between Monterey and Marin Counties (B.B.S.). A Fork-tailed Dec. 13 and Ashy Storm-Petrel Dec. 14, both at Monterey, were the only petrels seen alive and a Fork-tailed at Marina Dec. 13 and an Ashy at Pigeon Pt. Feb. 5 were dead on beaches (B.B.S.).

CORMORANTS THROUGH IBIS — On the Oakland CBC 438 Brandt's Cormorants were far above the two-year average of 91, with equal coverage. Similarly, Pelagic Cormorants were double the two-year average on the Oakland CBC with 29 on Dec. 21 (*fide* DE). Largest reported number of egrets in the Central Valley (C.V.) was 80 Greats at El Macero Mar. 1 (DAG) and 75 Snowies at Willows Dec. 29 (JS). Over 50 Cattle Egrets were found, all but two of which were coastal. A careful count revealed 56 White-faced Ibis at Los Banos Jan. 25 (LCB). A single was near Willows Mar. 16 (*fide* SAL) and six were at Grizzly I., Dec 23 (*fide* DR).

WATERFOWL — Of an estimated 35,500 waterfowl non-hunting deaths in the C.V., 30,000 were from cholera, 4500 from botulism and 1000 from lead poisoning. Most were dabbling ducks but geese and swans were also seriously affected. The lack of rain necessary to aeriate standing puddles is thought to be responsible for the diseases.

From Dec. 7 until late February 3000 swans were present at Victoria I. At least two had bills which exactly match the pattern of **Bewick's Swan** and an additional ten birds had varying amounts of yellow but more than extreme Whistling Swans (m.ob.). It appears that we are dealing with numerous hybrids. Another typical ad. Bewick's was with 1000 Whistling at the Chico Sewage Ponds Dec. 28 (RS). Huge numbers of Black Brant were noted passing north in the last week of March and into April. Highest was 3530 from Pigeon Pt. Mar. 25 (BS).

Another Brant was at Humboldt Bay for three days in the second week of March (*fide* TS). Eleven blue Snow Geese were reported. It appears from current studies that the population estimates for Ross' Goose are low by about half and there may be truly near 100,000 (*fide* RS). Several small "blue geese" were seen this winter, suggesting that either blue Snows are crossing Ross' or more outrageous that the Ross' actually has a blue morph. Ah, the obvious things we've never noticed.

Possibly because of very scarce water inland all dabbling duck species were in very high numbers at coastal estuaries and reservoirs (GP, P.R.B.O., BS). Only one (Eur.) Green-winged Teal was reported, which is lower than any in the last six years. It was at Arcata Feb. 20 (*fide* TS). Of 21 Eur. Wigeon noted four were at Bolinas (P.R.B.O.). Two obvious hybrids with Am. Wigeon were noted.

All *Aythya* were low along the coast except Canvasbacks which were normal, and scaup which were far above usual numbers with 91,072 on the Oakland CBC (*fide* DE). The Ring-necked x Tufted Duck hybrid (of last winter) was seen again at Rodeo Lagoon Dec. 27 (RS*, DW *et al.*). Goldeneye were in average numbers, with over 70 Barrow's reported. Oldsquaws were triple the average with 41 reports. The White-winged Scoter remained through Mar. 10 at Redding (BED) and another was at June L., Dec. 7. Black Scoters were high. Over 100 Hooded Mergansers reported is higher than usual. A male Red-breasted Merganser at Palicines Res., Feb. 14 (DE) is probably a first county record.

RAPTORS THROUGH RAILS — White-tailed Kites continue towards a common status throughout the C.V. and along the coast. None is more deserving a population boom in this era of withdrawal and extermination. Nine Goshawks, all from the Sierra and Cascade ranges, was a good showing. Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks were widely reported, as is usual, with Sharpies more common on the coast, and Cooper's more common in the C.V. Six "Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawks, three from the n. C.V. and three from Lassen and Modoc counties, are slightly more than the five-year average. Swainson's Hawks returned to the C.V. in early March (RS, GM) and one over Golden Gate Park Mar. 30 was a first record there (LCB). Rough-legged Hawks were all but missing from the coast and C.V. but were in usual good numbers in the Basin. Ferruginous Hawks were in good numbers December through February but none were reported after Mar. 7. Golden, 46, and Bald Eagles, 92, were again reported more often and from more new localities than ever before. Marsh Hawks and Ospreys were also more common than ever in most reported areas especially late in the period when migrants began moving through. Over 50 Prairie Falcons, 37 Peregrines and 30 Merlins were all encouraging totals as were 307 Am. Kestrels on the Pt. Reyes CBC alone! A banded female Am. Kestrel returned to the Farallon Is. for the third consecutive winter. It does not summer there (P.R.B.O.).

Reintroduced Turkeys were at: L. Wildwood, Nevada Co. 25 on Feb. 1 (JH), Mines Road, 21 on Feb. 15 (AE) and on the Eel R. in S. Humboldt Co., four on March 28 (*fide* TS). A well-known Sage Grouse lek near Honey L. held only 15 males this winter, where about 100 is normal.

Another lek at Crowley L. is in fine shape. It is probably a natural relocation owing to human disturbance rather than a reduction in population, however the situation should be carefully checked by government biologists.

Sandhill Cranes at Honey L., 350 on Mar. 7 (m.ob.) and in Surprise Valley, 16 on Mar. 6 (RS, JW *et al.*) were early returnees. Migrants in the C.V. were noted Feb. 22 and Mar. 1 (DAG). Virginia Rails apparently wintered in the Honey Valley as different singles were there found Dec. 31 and Jan. 2. (WS, KK). The Pt. Reyes CBC totaled 66 which is high. Four Black Rails at Kehoe Marsh Dec. 20 (RS, BV *et al.*) and three at Benecia S. P. Dec. 28 (JR) were the only ones reported. At Bolinas, 2726 coots was above the four-year average there (GP, P.R.B.O.).

SHOREBIRDS — At Shields Marsh, 32 Semipalmated Plovers Dec. 9 (DS) must have been fall migrants since the Pt. Reyes CBC total Dec. 20 was only 21. Snowy Plovers were noted as only one-half or one-third normal numbers at the Pajaro R. mouth (J&RW) but were well reported elsewhere. A total of nearly 3000 Killdeer was counted on the Pt. Reyes and Crystal Springs CBCs combined. That is an impressive number. Mountain Plovers were in usual places but generally very low in numbers this period, the most being 35 in Merced Co. Feb. 22 (TC). Only 26 Am. Golden Plovers were reported, which is less than half the number in a good year for them. On the Pt. Reyes CBC 827 Black and 34 Ruddy Turnstones were good numbers and probably reflect a representative ratio. On the Oakland CBC however, 32 Blacks was only about half average there. Common Snipe were clearly up in numbers reported, perhaps owing to many usual haunts being dried up, concentrating the species at permanent seepages. Like snipe, both species of yellowlegs were highly reported because of their concentrations at available puddles.

The usual four or five Rock Sandpipers were at Bodega Head (m. ob.) and one Jan. 18 (WS, KK) then two on Mar. 14 (GMcC, DR) were near Bean Hollow Beach. One or two also wintered on the Humboldt jetties (*vide* TS). Least Sandpipers, Dunlin, Marbled Godwit and Am. Avocets were in highest numbers of the past four years at Bolinas (P.R.B.O.). Two Black-necked Stilts on the Pt. Reyes CBC Dec. 20 (RS, GM) were further evidence that the species is spreading north along the coast. Single N. Phalaropes found dead at Pajaro Dunes Dec. 13 & 22 (B.B.S.) and an injured individual at Moss Landing Feb. 14 (JS) are all unusual winter records. Only 15 Red Phalaropes were noted.

JAEGERS AND GULLS — Twenty Pomarine and only three Parasitic Jaegers were reported, all from Monterey Bay. Five Western x Glaucous-winged Gulls were reported from the coast. They are likely quite common and often misidentified as other species. Fourteen Glaucous Gulls were reported, representing at least ten individuals. About 100 Thayer's Gulls were reported from the coast plus one on the Feather R. at Oroville Dec. 29-Feb. 27 (RS, DW, P.R.B.O.) for a first county record. Twenty-eight Mew Gulls from six inland locations was above average. Normal hundreds were on the coast. Black-legged Kittiwakes staged a major invasion along the coast, comprised mostly of adults

(m.ob.). The peak dieoff was in late February and early March when five per km. were picked up (B.B.S.).

TERNS AND ALCIDS — Forster's Terns wintered at more places and in larger numbers than ever. A Com. Tern was carefully studied and described on the Oakland CBC Dec. 21 (WMP) for the latest regional record. On the Oakland CBC 251 Com. Murres dwarfed the previous high of 7. Forty-two Pigeon Guillemots on the Pt. Reyes CBC was very high. The first regional winter record for Xantus' Murrelets was of three off Pt. Pinos Feb. 15 (C.F.O.). Ancient Murrelets and Rhinoceros Auklets were high in number but Cassin's Auklets were low especially on trips from Monterey. Two Horned and one Tufted Puffins were found beached (BBS) and a Tufted on Monterey Bay Jan. 10 (RS, F.A.S.) was the only other one reported.

PIGEONS THROUGH GOATSUCKERS — A White-winged Dove, rare anywhere in the Region, appeared in Palo Alto Feb. 14 (TC). Nearly all the records are for fall and winter. An unusually high concentration of 40 Mourning Doves was found at Willow Creek, Humboldt Co. Dec. 28 (*vide* TS). A Ground Dove was found at Half Moon Bay Dec. 11 where it remained until Mar. 14 (PM*, BS). Another was seen 20 km. south of the Half Moon Bay at Pigeon Pt. Nov. 29. (AB*). Both records may be of the same individual. There are at least five previous records for the Region (reference in *Am. Birds* 28,690,1974 is in error). In recent years the pattern of extralimital occurrences of this species suggests the true vagrants are most likely to turn up in the fall.

The Oakland CBC recorded 52 Great Horned Owls which is down considerably from their high of 146 on last year's count (*vide* DE). Most remarkable was the presence of 70 Burrowing Owls at West Newark Dec. 28 (GZ, EM). High count for Short-eared Owls during the period was 13 birds near Davis Feb. 22 (RS *et al.*) In general owls were reported in good numbers throughout the region.

Several Poor-wills, scarce in winter, were seen near Bolinas in January (DS, BM, RS).

SWIFTS THROUGH WOODPECKERS — A ♂ Black-chinned Hummingbird was found on the Sacramento CBC Dec. 27 (*vide* BK). There are very few winter records for this species. Two ♂ Costa's Hummingbirds were reported. One returned to a feeder near Loomis for the third winter in a row on Dec. 5 (*vide* BK), and another was seen frequenting a feeder on the Oakland CBC, Dec. 21 (*vide* DE). Both Rufous and Allen's Hummingbirds were present in the region by the end of January, which is normal for Allen's but a little early for Rufous.

Lewis' Woodpeckers were found in a large concentration consisting of about 300 birds s.e. of Redding near Battle Creek Mar. 8-12 (BED). The observation of a Williamson's Sapsucker 10 km. west of Trinity Center Jan. 24 is noteworthy since the status of this species in Trinity County is uncertain (*vide* TS). An excellent description of what appears to be a Downy x Nuttall's Woodpecker (*D. pubescens* x *nuttallii*) hybrid was recorded Mar. 26 in n.e. Contra Costa county (JM*, DE*, DR). Hybrids between the two species are known but they are fairly rare.

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH SWALLOWS — An Ash-throated Flycatcher was found on the San Jose CBC at Alviso Dec. 21 (B&CY*). There are very few acceptable winter records for this species. The Region's first **Olivaceous Flycatcher** was found on Dec. 7 and remained throughout the period at the Carmel R. mouth (GZ*, RD, m.ob.). There are only three previous state records for this species, all from the Southern Pacific Coast Region. Two and possibly three E. Phoebes were found during the period. A single bird was found at Palicines, San Benito Co. Jan. 24 (JM*) and remained until Feb. 22, and another found on the West Sonoma CBC at Bodega Bay Jan. 3 (m.ob.*) and was last seen Feb. 7. This bird or a third individual was found Dec. 14 at Salmon Creek, Sonoma Co. about 3½ km. n.e. of the spot where the bird at Bodega Bay was found (JM*, RD, GZ). A few Say's Phoebes appear to have wintered in the n.e. part of the region. A Dusky Flycatcher was caught, banded, and photographed at Putah Creek, Yolo Co., Jan. 27 (DAG*). This is the first winter record for the Region. A **Coues' Flycatcher**, the second for the Region, was found at New Brighton Beach S.P., Santa Cruz, Dec. 6 and remained, to the delight of many observers, until Feb. 18 (RM* EM*, Robert Ramer).

Violet-green Swallow wintered in rather larger numbers. A flock of 140 was found Jan. 3 at Pescadero Marsh (RM).

CORVIDS THROUGH THRUSHES — A Yellow-billed Magpie, west of its normal range, was noted when a single bird was found on Bay Farm I. Dec. 21 (AE, GB). A rather noticeable flock of 235 Piñon Jays was seen at Eagle Lake Mar. 6 (LCB *et al.*). Blue List Bewick's Wrens were reported as "common" during the period in both Sutter and Yolo Counties (JH). The Bendire's Thrasher reported last fall remained throughout the period at Courtland (AP). The Brown Thrasher reported in Oakland last November remained through the end of the period (m.ob.). A Sage Thrasher, west of its normal range, was seen near Oroville Dec. 28 (P.R.B.O.). The Soquel CBC reported a high count of 18,000 robins (*fide* RM). Varied Thrushes appear to have wintered in smaller numbers. A Hermit Thrush, rare in the Great Basin in winter, was seen near Standish, Lassen Co., Jan. 1 (DE). Swainson's Thrushes reported in winter in the Region usually are misidentified Hermit Thrushes, however a well-described Swainson's was reported on the Palo Alto CBC at Searsville L. Dec. 23 (CY*). Following last fall's movement, Townsend's Solitaires appeared on the count; single birds were found on the Ano Nuevo CBC Jan. 3 (*fide* BS), and on Martin Grade Rd., Santa Cruz Dec. 21 (JM, EM).

WAXWINGS THROUGH VIREOS — Bohemian Waxwings staged a major invasion of the state; the largest since the winter of 1968-69. They reached their southernmost penetration at Angwin, Napa Co., where a single bird was found Jan. 24 (Glenn Clifton). At least 25 reports were received; the largest concentration was of some 3200 birds at Janesville, Lassen Co., Feb. 26 (RS, GH). Nearly all the reports were limited to the northeastern part of the state. There were no reports from the coast. Northern Shrikes wintered in normal numbers. Two appeared south of their normal coastal range; one was found at Bodega Bay Jan. 10 (LCB) and another was

seen at Nacassio Res., Marin Co., Feb. 18-23 (WMP, JM). A wintering Warbling Vireo was found on the Crystal Springs CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* BS).

WOOD WARBLERS — Owing to the temperate weather throughout the period, warblers overwintered in substantial numbers, providing some rather remarkable records. At least eight Black-and-white Warblers were reported along the coast from Humboldt Bay to San Francisco Dec. 3 - Jan. 6 (m.ob.). Four Nashville Warblers were reported from Petaluma to the Carmel R. Mouth Dec. 7 - Jan. 3 (RD, DE, GP, GLB). A single Yellow Warbler was seen at Gray Lodge N.W.R. Dec. 23 (RS, BED) and most amazing was the presence of a **Cape May Warbler** at Santa Cruz from Feb. 1 through the end of the period (WG, m.ob.*). This record is the first winter occurrence for the state. An apparent Townsend's x Hermit Warbler (*D. townsendi* x *occidentalis*) hybrid was captured, photographed and banded at Palomarin Mar. 18 (P.R.B.O.). Hybrids of these two species are known. Hermit Warblers wintered in remarkable numbers. At least 14 individuals were found from Sebastopol to San Mateo County, Dec. 20 - Jan. 11 (m.ob.). At least six Palm Warblers were found from Bodega Bay to Santa Cruz Dec. 21 - Feb. 21 (PM, JW, WG, LCB, *etc.*). A single N. Waterthrush was present Dec. 1 - Feb. 1 in the Carmel R. mouth (m.ob.). Single Wilson's Warblers were found on the Crystal Springs CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* BS), and in Claremont Canyon, Berkeley Dec. 21 (*fide* DE). An ad. ♂ Am. Redstart was present throughout the period in Sebastopol (m.ob., *fide* CP).

BLACKBIRDS THROUGH TANAGERS — Small numbers of Yellow-headed Blackbirds appeared to have wintered in the northeastern part of the Region, while 125 were found at Jersey I., Contra Costa Co. (DE, JM, DR). Two Hooded Orioles were seen in Fresno Dec. 2 - Jan. 21 (*fide* RH). Single "Bullock's" Orioles were seen Feb. 2, in Golden Gate Park (LCB), Fresno, Feb. 18 (RH *et al.*), and at Soquel Jan. 26 (RM). A Rusty Blackbird was found at Indian Creek Res., Alpine Co. (WS*, KK*). Most of the records for this species in the Region are along the Coast. A few W. Tanagers wintered, which is normal for this species.

FRINGILLIDS — Single Black-headed Grosbeaks were reported from Grazos Creek, San Mateo Co., Dec. 2 (JR), Asilomar Dec. 14 (GMCC), and San Leandro Res., Oakland Dec. 21 (*fide* DE). Incredible was the discovery of a ♀ -plumaged Blue Grosbeak on the Redding CBC Jan. 3 (RS, DT *et al.*). There are no previous regional winter records for this species. A rather large flock of 450 Evening Grosbeaks was seen at Fredonyer Summit Dec. 28 (P.R.B.O.). Gray-crowned Rosy Finches were reported in good numbers from the n.e. part of the Region. Most noticeable was a flock of 107 Hepburn's Rosy Finches (*L.t. littoralis*) just north of Cedarville, Modoc Co. Jan. 10 (SFB). An out-of-range, out-of-season Green-tailed Towhee was seen at Kehoe Marsh, Marin Co., Jan. 4 (L. Stenzel). A single Lark Bunting was found along West Butte Rd., Sutter Co. Feb. 29 (P.R.B.O., RS). Very rare in winter, a Grasshopper Sparrow was seen in Coyote Hills Park Dec. 4 (DE).

At least 22 Tree Sparrows were reported, which would indicate that this species probably wintered in substantial

numbers. Most of the records were from the n.e. part of the region where a large flock of 11 birds was seen on Jan. 10 at the s.e. corner of Tule Lake N.W.R. (SFB). There were two reports from the coast; a single bird was found at Half Moon Bay Dec. 11-30 (PM,BS) and three birds were present at Sears Pt., Sonoma Co., Feb. 15-Mar. 13 (L. Stafford, *m.ob.*). The winter distribution of Chipping Sparrow is somewhat of an enigma throughout the region. Winter records of this species can be virtually non-existent in one coastal area and a few km. away a regular winter visitor. The bird is difficult to find in Marin County in winter, but at least four birds were present just to the north near Santa Rosa Dec. 14 (GLB, BDP). The second regional wintering **Clay-colored Sparrow** was found at Pt. Reyes Station Jan. 10 (LCB, BDP, GLB). Harris' Sparrows were present at Olema Marsh in good numbers where at least ten were found on the Pt. Reyes CBC Dec. 20 (RS, JW *et al*). A handful of Lapland Longspurs wintered along the coast, but a rather large flock of 55 was seen in the Arcata Bottoms the last week in January (*vide* TS). Fifteen Chestnut-collared Longspurs were found at Honey Lake Jan. 1, and two McCown's Longspurs were present there on the same date (*m.ob.*)

CONTRIBUTORS AND ABBREVIATIONS — David Ainley, Carol Anderson, Maurine Armour, Stephen F. Bailey, Bernice Barnes (BB), Laurence C. Binford, George Bing, Tony Bledsoe, Gordon L.

Bolander, William Bousman, Betty Burridge (BBu), California Field Ornithologists, Central Valley, Alan Craig, Rosamond S. Day, Richard Dean, Bruce E. Deuel, Phil Detrich, Jon Dunn, Art Edwards, Dick Erickson, Jules Evans, Lynn Farrar, Fresno Audubon Society, David A. Gaines, Winnifred Greene, Keith Hansen, Rob Hansen, Tom Heindel, Phil Henderson, Glenda Hightower, Joel Hornstein, Paul Kelly, Margaret Keith, Betty Kimball (BK), Barb Klasson (BKl), Ken Knittle, Oliver J. Kolkmann, Phyllis Laymon, Stephen A. Laymon, Ron LeValley, Tom Love, Eugene Makishima, many observers (*m.ob.*), Peter Metropulos, Bill Manolis, Georgianne Manolis, Brian J. McCaffery, Guy McCaskie, Randall Morgan, Joe Morlan, Jim Morris (JiM), Adeene Nelligan, Pacific Seabird Group, Gary Page, Arvil Parker, Benjamin D. Parmeter, Carmen Patterson, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, William M. Pursell, Van Remsen, Jean Richmond, Don Roberson, Ane Rovetta, Dave Rudholm, Barry Sauppe (BS), PRBO Beached Bird Survey (B.B.S.), Tom Schulenberg, Doris M. Shanks (DMS), Dave Shuford (DS), John Silvas, Jim Snowden, Bruce Sorrie (BSO), Rich Stallcup, Lynn Stenzel, Wally Sumner, Dean Taylor, Phil Unitt, John and Ricky Warriner, Bruce Williford, Dave Winkler, Jon Winter, Bob and Carol Yutzy, Gary Zamzow, —**RICH STALLCUP**, 4409 44th Ave. Sacto., Ca. 95824 and **JON WINTER**, Point Reyes Bird Observatory Box 321 Bolinas, Ca. 94924.