

# MIDDLE PACIFIC COAST REGION

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Offshore cruises continued to shed light on the status of our deep-water dwelling species. On land our third straight drought season prevailed. This may have been the cause of certain waterfowl species concentrating in big numbers on what little water was available. Among land-birds, the fall trend of few montane irruptives—especially Red-breasted Nuthatch, thrushes, and finches—persisted through the winter. It was a poor season for overwintering insectivores and rarities.

We are grateful to Kurt F. Campbell for compiling the landbird reports for Yee's analysis.

**ABBREVIATIONS**—C.B.R.C. = California Bird Records Committee; C.V. = Central Valley; F.I. = Southeast Farallon Island; S.F. = San Francisco; ph. = photo on file with Regional Editors. All records from F.I. should be credited to Pt. Reyes Bird Observatory (P.R.B.O.). Place names in *italics* are counties.

**LOONS TO FRIGATEBIRDS**—In December, loons (and Double-crested Cormorants) rapidly accumulated on ponds and reservoirs along the east slope of the Santa Cruz Mts., Santa Clara, then disappeared in early January. Reports totaled 29 Red-throats, five Pacifics, and 12 Commons, with Shoreline L. hosting the most (nine, four, and five respectively). Unlike the influx of 1983–1984, there was no obvious storm cause and no loons appeared farther east in the county. An ad. Yellow-billed Loon at Crescent City Dec. 13 furnished Del Norte's 2nd record (†ADB). Red-necked Grebes were back

in healthy numbers after a low year. The highest counts were 47 on the Pt. Reyes CBC Dec. 17 (*fide* DWm) and 21 at Shelter Cove, Humboldt, Jan. 4 (R. Sutherland). One on L. Shastina Dec. 17 (RE) was the latest ever for Siskiyou.

Single Laysan Albatrosses were near Cordell Bank, Marin, Dec. 4 (DN, TCo), off Pt. Pinos about Dec. 5 (N. Lemon), and off Big Sur Dec. 26 (RT). These were eclipsed by the 45 Laysans recorded on an oceanographic cruise from 140 mi s.w. of Pt. Arena, Mendocino, to 74 mi s.w. of Punta Gorda, Humboldt, Dec. 8, compared with only 10 Black-footeds (PP, LS). This cruise track also produced three **Mottled Petrels**, all in Mendocino (LS, †PP). A Flesh-footed Shearwater 30 mi off Pillar Pt. Feb. 2 (BS) was the first in winter for San Mateo. A Brandt's Cormorant on Shoreline L. Dec. 9–21 (PLN, †DLSu, m.ob.) represented the only recent *Santa Clara* record. The unseasonal frigatebird that buzzed F.I. Dec. 16 was not identified to species, but presumably was Magnificent.

**HERONS TO WATERFOWL**—A Least Bittern at L. Merced, S.F., Jan. 28 (DPM) was among few ever found on the coast of our Region, especially in winter. A Snowy Egret x Little Blue Heron was present all Period at Charleston Slough, Santa Clara (WGB et al.). A White-faced Ibis in the Elkhorn Slough/Salinas R. mouth area Dec. 4–Jan. 4 (CKf, DR et al.) was believed to be the same individual present since September. Surprisingly, there are 3 previous January–March records from coastal Monterey in the early 1980s (Roberson, 1985. Monterey Birds. Monterey Peninsula Aud. Soc.).



The 38,667 Tundra Swans on the Stockton CBC Dec. 17 more than doubled the previous high (DGY et al.), and broke the North American CBC record (see AB 40:1075). A **Whooper Swan** on Venice I., San Joaquin, Dec. 16 (†MJL) was with thousands of migratory waterfowl and would seem every bit as valid as California's only previously accepted record (Jan. 17–19, 1984 near Grimes, Colusa). Another at Mountain Lake Park, S.F., Jan. 28 had been present some time and was assumed feral (JM). There have been rumors of captive Whoopers in wild situations (we've received no details prior to this), and considerable discontent ever since the C.B.R.C. decision on the Grimes bird. Observers are doing a disservice when they fail to place their observations and documentation on file with us and/or the C.B.R.C. because they have decided a record is invalid. Only after an analysis of all sightings, and possible sightings, can the best judgment be made on problematic records such as these.

Another C.B.R.C. review species, Trumpeter Swan, was reported largely without details. An immature was reported at L. Almanor, Plumas, Dec. 29 (MDH) and two immatures were seen and heard at Honey Lake W.A., Lassen, Jan. 2–3 (JTr, †TDM et al.). One picked up dead on Venice I., San Joaquin, Jan. 20 as part of a fowl cholera cleanup was identified in the hand by state Fish & Game personnel but was not saved (*fide* BED) and an adult just w. of Nelson, Butte, Feb. 10 (JHS) was traced to the Lower Mackenzie District of the Yukon by its red collar with white alphanumeric markings (*fide* BED). Reports continuing to lack adequate documentation should ultimately be rejected by the C.B.R.C., but this policy seems not yet to be fully implemented.

A Ross' Goose at Calero Res. Jan. 12 (DLSu) was Santa Clara's 2nd; four others were reported from the coast. A count of 27,000 was made at Merced N.W.R. Jan. 27 (GZ). Three blue Ross' Geese and six blue Snow x Ross' Geese were reported from the C.V., but an apparent family group at Sacramento N.W.R., Glenn, Nov. 20 and Feb. 12 (MJL) illustrated how difficult it can be to assign names to these birds. A ♂ blue Snow x Ross' Goose and a ♀ white Ross' Goose were accompanied by two blue young. One young was "turning into archetypical blue Ross'" and the other into "something slightly less than archetypical." Inland Brant were found near Nicolaus Jan. 26 (Sutter's first—BED) and s. of Durham, Butte, Feb. 21 (JHS). Single Cackling Canada Geese (*race minima*) were found on the coast at Hayward Regional Shoreline Dec. 29 (RJr), the Pajaro R. mouth Dec. 21 (RFT), and Elkhorn Slough Jan. 1 (DR et al.). Aside from a small number that regularly travel through Del Norte with Aleutian Canada Geese (*race leucopareia*), this form is quite rare on the coast.

Six Eurasian Green-winged Teal were found, two in the Sacramento Valley and four on south S.F. Bay. A bird showing characteristics of both the American and Eurasian forms was at Palo Alto Baylands Feb. 4 (JM). Another intermediate form was the Blue-winged x Cinnamon Teal at Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, Feb. 16 (†PJM). Eight Eur. Wigeon near Ft. Dick, Del Norte, Dec. 11 bested last year's record five there (ADB); 13 were w. of Nelson, Butte, Feb. 15 (JHS). Eurasian x Am. Wigeon were reported again: one near Ft. Dick Dec. 18 (ADB) and one at L. Solano, Solano/Yolo (date?—ECB).

Aerial and ground counts of Ring-necked Ducks on Dec. 7 totaled 44,000 at Butte Sink W.A., Sutter (BED et al.), a record California count. A ♂ Ring-necked Duck x scaup sp. in Oakland Feb. 18 was back for at least its 5th winter there (JM). Four Tufted Ducks were reported: a male found Nov. 21 and a female found Nov. 26 visited several S.F. lakes before settling for most of the winter at the old Sutro Baths (DPM, †JM, †ph. SFB, m.ob.); a male was at Mallard Res., Contra Costa, Dec. 31 (†RJr et al.); and a male was at the Smith R. estuary Jan. 17–Feb. 11 for its 2nd winter (†ADB, †LPL et al.). The season's only King Eider, an imm. male, was at Moss Landing Dec. 9–Jan. 9 (†DEG et al.). Point St. George, Del Norte, produced another record high Black Scoter count: 253 on Dec. 18 (ADB). A Surf Scoter at the Hollister sewage ponds

Dec. 28 was San Benito's first (KVV) and one at the Modesto sewage ponds Jan. 24 (RMcN) was Stanislaus' second. A count of 193 Hooded Mergansers on L. Frey, Solano, Jan. 9 (M. Berner) nearly doubled the previous state high count.

**RAPTORS**—Most raptors were reported in unusually high numbers, especially Rough-legged Hawk and Merlin. One or two Black-shouldered Kites appeared around Edge-wood, Siskiyou, Dec. 17 and Jan. 18 (MFRb). Four N. Goshawks were very rare in the S.F. Bay area: at S.F. Zoo Dec. 4 (A. Indelicato), over Tiburon Dec. 31 (†BHi), on Mt. Diablo, Contra Costa, Dec. 31–Jan. 14 (†JM, †RJr, B. Chilson, KGH), and at Castle Rock S.P., Santa Cruz, Feb. 22 (DLSu). An imm. Broad-winged Hawk wintered in the S.F. Presidio Dec. 21–Feb. 13 (RS, m.ob.), while an adult was over Golden Gate Park, S.F., Feb. 11 and an unaged bird was by Mt. San Bruno, San Mateo, Dec. 23 (both ASH).

In an amazing continuation of the annual trend of latest- and earliest-ever Swainson's Hawks in the Delta, San Joaquin, this year credible reports completely spanned the winter months (DGY, GEW et al.), with the shocker being nine together on King I. Jan. 15 (MJL)! I (SFB) am prompted to speculate that this species may now winter in the Delta. Three of four "Harlan's" Hawk reports had details: in Solano Jan. 7 (†MBG), in San Joaquin Feb. 4 (†DGY), and in Sacramento Feb. 5 and Mar. 12 (†TDM). Even farther from the species' normal range than the fall 1987 Mono bird, an elusive Crested Caracara e. of Grenada, Siskiyou, Oct. 21–Mar. 12 will surely provoke similar controversy on its origin (M. & B. Machado, ph. B. Balfrey, m.ob.). It appeared to be a 2nd-winter bird, of the northern subspecies expected of either an escaped captive or a wild vagrant (†ADB, †RE, †MFRb).

**GROUSE TO SHOREBIRDS**—Ruffed Grouse drumming reaches its peak in March and April in our Region, and our records show sporadic post-breeding drumming until August, so a male hard at it Jan. 29 along Dunn Creek, n.e. Del Norte (ADB) was certainly early. Sandhill Cranes are rare coastally in our Region; one slightly inland at Shoreline Lake Dec. 12 (JY, AL) furnished the 2nd Santa Clara record.

A Greater Yellowlegs at Mono Lake Dec. 18 (E. King) and one near Mammoth Jan. 1 (B. Johnston) furnished the first winter records for Mono. A Ruddy Turnstone at the Modesto sewage ponds Feb. 17–20 (†HMR, ERC) provided only the 2nd winter record from the Region's interior. At this same site was a Sanderling Dec. 21–Feb. 21 (†HMR et al.). A late Pectoral Sandpiper was in the Arcata Bottoms, Humboldt, Dec. 4 (M. Morris). Stretching inner S.F. Bay wintering to the limit were four Short-billed Dowitchers at Suisun Marsh, Solano, Dec. 19 (G. Clifton). Yet another winter period Wilson's Phalarope was found, with one at the Salinas R. mouth Dec. 15 (†DEG) that could not be found thereafter.

**GULLS TO ALCIDS**—Three wintering Franklin's Gulls were slightly more than average. November's ad. Little Gull frequented 3 more sites in San Joaquin throughout the period (†AME, †A. Kratter, m.ob.), and it flew into Sacramento Dec. 17 (MDC) for the first non-San Joaquin C.V. record. Santa Clara's 4th Heermann's Gull was a 2nd-winter bird at Palo Alto Dec. 19 (TAC, PLN). Massive feeding flocks of gulls on the Monterey Bay (pelagic) CBC Dec. 29 represented record highs for six species, even though thousands of distant gulls went unidentified: 2990 Heermann's, 6710 Californias, 434 Herrings, 43 Thayer's, 6200 Westerns, and 395 Glaucous-wingeds (R. Norden, SFB, DLSH). Both the 3rd-winter W. Gull and the first-winter Glaucous-winged x W. Gull at Lucerne, Clear L., Dec. 3 (both †RAE) were Lake firsts. Apparent hybrid



adults of expected but seldom-identified combinations were the Glaucous x Herring Gull at the Sacramento R., Sacramento, Dec. 1 (†RAE) and the Glaucous x Glaucous-winged Gull at Mallard Res., Contra Costa, Dec. 31-Jan. 1 (†RJR). Of 16 Glaucous Gulls, four inland birds included an adult at Modesto sewage ponds, Stanislaus, Feb. 19 (†ph. ERC).

One tardy Elegant Tern inhabited Half Moon Bay, San Mateo, Dec. 4-17 (†GHF, KGH, BS). A Com. Murre flew in to Shoreline L. Dec. 19 (A. Kratter, M. Rogers) but did not stay. Three Parakeet Auklets plus five "probables" from 130 to 78 mi off Mendocino Dec. 8 (LS, †PP) were among the very few healthy individuals ever seen in California waters, but they may have been at the eastern edge of this species' likely normal winter range in the North Pacific Gyre (PP).

**DOVES TO WOODPECKERS** — A White-winged Dove in S.F. Dec. 3 (DPM) likely was a late fall bird, but one in Arcata Dec. 11-Jan. 10 (I. Krestensen et al.) may have represented one of our few truly wintering individuals. A Mourning Dove at Mono Lake Dec. 18 (ES) established a December first for Mono. The Barred Owl at Howland Hill, Del Norte, was still present as of Feb. 22 (†ADB). Our strongest showing of Short-eared Owl in 4 years produced 26 coastal reports of 100+ birds with high numbers reported from the interior as well.

Perhaps the bird of the season was the roadkilled **Chuck-will's-widow** found near Loleta, Humboldt, during the period Dec. 12-16 (J. Aggan, \*Humboldt State Univ.), for the state's 2nd record. A ♂ Costa's Hummingbird at Clear Lake Jan. 14-28 (C. McKenny et al.) was Lake's first. In modifying past statements (AB 39:207 & 42:317), the now annual occurrence of identifiable Rufous Hummingbirds during early February (two coastal birds this year) implies the beginning of Regional spring movement since nearly all "wintering" *Selasphorus* sp. are unidentifiable immatures (two coastal December birds this year). Unprecedentedly, more Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were reported than Red-naped Sapsuckers by a 5:3 ratio (there's nothing like an AOU split!). Among the former were the following singles: Siskiyou's first near Grenada Dec. 8-17 (RE, NEC, †MFRb), near Arcata Dec. 17 (J. Allen), the San Jose CBC Dec. 18 (C. Otahal), Monterey Dec. 27 (†BJW—Monterey's 3rd), and Solano's fall bird Jan. 16-Feb. 21 (†MBG, DL). A Red-breasted Sapsucker at Lee Vining Jan. 5-13 was a January first for the Mono Basin (ES). Four apparent Red-breasted x Red-naped Sapsuckers were also reported: Arastradero Preserve, Santa Clara, Dec. 6-19 (†PLN); Tiburon, Marin Dec. 31 (†BHI); and one each at Gateway Oaks Jan. 18 and Reichmuth Park Jan. 31 in Sacramento (both †TDM).

**FLYCATCHERS TO VIREOS** — An *Empidonax* flycatcher found in Redwood Regional Park, Alameda, Dec. 13-Jan. 17 (RJR, †JM, †HG) was identified as a **Hammond's Flycatcher** after careful study. It was probably the same bird from last year. Two coastal W. Flycatchers was average. Most vagrant Black Phoebe sightings in the Great Basin are for spring or fall, so one at Mono Lake Jan. 27 (S. Schmidt) was considered a first in winter for the Mono Basin. A very rare Ash-throated Flycatcher was found near Pajaro, Monterey, Jan. 1-2 (I. Manici, †PJM). Wandering chickadees included a Mountain Chickadee in Trinidad Dec. 10 (GSL) and a Chestnut-backed at Del Valle Regional Park, Alameda, Feb. 22 (ALE). Also displaced were a White-breasted Nuthatch at High Divide Dec. 18-Jan. 26 (GSL, ADB) and a House Wren near Ft. Dick Dec. 14-18 (RAE, ADB), both Del Norte, and Rock Wrens near Stockton (two) Dec. 17 (DGY et al.) and at the Albany Landfill, Alameda, Dec. 18 (JM). Now possibly resident, the Canyon Wren in Pine Canyon, Contra Costa, was still present Jan. 3 (†KGH).

The newly established W. Bluebird frontier in Lee Vining had three spring arrivals Feb. 25 (ES). Mountain Bluebird was the only thrush well reported (35 reports along interior valley edges), including one at Modoc N.W.R. Feb. 14 (ECKb). Brown



Brown Thrasher at Bodega, California, January 3, 1989. Photograph/Dan Nelson.

Thrashers unexpectedly wintered in Bodega Jan. 2-14 (BDP, ph. DN et al.) and F.I. (Oct. 30 into March) but the **Bendire's Thrasher** near Acampo, San Joaquin, expectedly wintered until Mar. 11 (DGY). Probably the most scrutinized bird of the season was the imm. **White/Black-backed Wagtail** at Moss Landing Dec. 23-Jan. 21 (†DEG, †JM, ph. †DR, m.ob.). Usually these first-year birds are indistinguishable in the field but a number of the bird's traits strongly suggested White Wagtail of the race *ocularis*. Unfortunately, the bird left before molting into its distinguishing adult plumage. If confirmed by the C.B.R.C. as a White Wagtail it would represent a first for the Region. Readers interested in the White/Black-backed super-species complex are referred to Morlan (1981, Status and identification of forms of White Wagtail in W. North America. *Continental Birdlife* 2:2:37-50). Our only Bohemian Waxwings were two to five birds at Somes Bar, w. Siskiyou, Feb. 7-9 (JSe), an area where few, if any, have ever been reported. Northern Shrikes abounded with 24 birds reported, including two in the C.V.: Los Banos W.M.A., Merced, Jan. 21-Feb. 25 (B. Dyer, m.ob.) and near Davis Jan. 31-Feb. 26 (BMx, m.ob.). Our single Solitary Vireo (race *cassinii*) was along Pescadero Creek Dec. 31 (PJM), San Mateo's first in winter.

**WARBLERS TO TANAGERS** — Three coastal Tennessee Warblers made our lowest total in 10 years, but 31+ coastal Nashville Warblers added points to their winter average. *Dendroica* fans in the C.V. commented on the paucity of Black-throated Gray Warblers, contrasting with the abundance of 14 Townsend's Warblers (TDM, HMR), while a Hermit Warbler at American R. Parkway, Sacramento, Dec. 11 (GEw) was a nice bonus. A healthy 37 Palm Warblers were reported. Leading the entourage were one inland at the Hollister Sewage Ponds Dec. 28 (†KVV), for San Benito's first, and an individual of the e. race *hypochrysea* in Tiburon, Marin, Dec. 25-31 (†DAH, †JCo).

Inland Black-and-white Warblers included one in Davis Dec. 12 (MP), and Butte's first in Chico Dec. 30-Jan. 20 (JHS). Four Am. Redstarts dotted the central coast. The parulid threat of the season was the Region's 3rd wintering **Worm-eating Warbler** in Pescadero Jan. 2-16 (†JAC, †m.ob.). Another 15 mi north in Half Moon Bay Dec. 3 (†PJM) may well have been the same bird. A N. Waterthrush at Pt. Reyes Station Dec. 17 (JW) was probably a tardy fall bird but one near Ferndale, Humboldt, Jan. 1 (RLeV) may have been attempting to winter. A wintering Wilson's Warbler in Sacramento Dec. 1-Jan. 1 (TDM, GEw) was a C.V. rarity. The ♂ Summer Tanager returned for his 4th winter along Corralitos Cr., Santa Cruz, Nov. 7-Jan. 28 (BMMo, JMS), and seven W. Tanagers were found including three in late January.

**GROSBEAKS TO FINCHES** — Our only Rose-breasted Grosbeak was in Berkeley Feb. 5-24 (M. Craig et al.), while three Black-headed Grosbeaks were holiday specials: singles at Menlo Park Dec. 24-28 (PJM), Año Nuevo Point Dec. 27-



28 (GJS), and Hayward Jan. 1 (RPD). A Brown Towhee at Arcata Feb. 22 (B. Widowson) was casual that far north along the coast. A concentration of 30 Am. Tree Sparrows at Modoc N.W.R. Feb. 18 (EckB) was our highest on record. Fifteen Chipping Sparrows near Acampo, San Joaquin, Dec. 15 (DGY) were where 13 had wintered last year, but Clay-colored Sparrows at Half Moon Bay Dec. 9 (RSTh) and Arcata Dec. 17-20 (R.S. & A.W. Lockett et al.) were evidently late fall birds. A Lark Sparrow in S.F. on Jan. 15 was "rare here at any season" (JM). Several *canescens/nevadensis* type Sage Sparrows in e. Stanislaus Dec. 28 and Feb. 25 confirmed wintering in the area (HMR).

The Region was dazzled by its first wintering **Le Conte's Sparrow** near Ft. Dick, Del Norte, Jan. 5-Feb. 11 (†RAE, †ADB, †GSL, †LPL, ph. RE et al.). Four Sharp-tailed Sparrows were reported including San Mateo's first at Pescadero Marsh Dec. 21-Jan. 28 (†GHT, BS). For the 3rd straight winter, high numbers of Swamp and White-throated sparrows were reported: 52 and 45 respectively. Coastally, the former has definitely outgrown its vagrant label, but it is still considered as such in the interior where only two were found: Bract Tract, San Joaquin, Dec. 17 (†T. Schantz) and Brush L., Stanislaus, Jan. 2 (†T. Poole). In addition to S.F.'s wintering Harris' Sparrow Oct. 23-Feb. 11 (m.ob.) there were three others: San Luis N.W.R. Dec. 9 (B. Diedericks), Lee Vining Dec. 11-Feb. 21 (ES), and American R. Parkway, Sacramento, Feb. 5 and later (DoM, †TDM et al.). The "Gray-headed" Junco in McKinleyville loitered through the period (RLeV) while the Moraga bird said goodbyes Dec. 18 (GA).

A **McCown's Longspur** made the Del Norte list near Ft. Dick Dec. 30-Jan. 18 (ADB, †GSL, †LPL, ph. R.S. Lockett). It was only the 4th in the Region this decade and the first to winter along our coast. Lapland Longspurs (100+) were again attracted to Gazelle Flats, Siskiyou, Dec. 29 (RE, MFRb) but had vanished by Jan. 20. A W. Meadowlark at Mono Lake Dec. 18 (E. King) furnished one of few winter records for that locale. The Moss Landing area produced a Rusty Blackbird for one tantalizing day Jan. 23 (KH, JM, PP). The tenacious pair of Great-tailed Grackles was still at S.F.'s Aquatic Park Dec. 21 (B. Hogan). While Pacific Grove was enjoying its wintering Orchard Oriole (through Feb. 26—DR), another male visited the Sunset District of S.F. Jan. 21-29 (B. Berg et al.). Our only Hooded Oriole was in Alamo, Contra Costa, Dec. 29-Jan. 11 (†JMR et al.). A normal six N. Orioles were uncovered along the coast with only two identified as "Bul-

lock's." Purple Finch, Red Crossbill, and Pine Siskin continued to be scarce throughout the Region, especially in the lowlands. Evening Grosbeak was basically a ditto; however, 2000+ on the L. Almanor CBC, Plumas, Dec. 29 (HG et al.) provided our highest winter concentration on record and caused one to sigh in bewilderment.

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