

MIDDLE PACIFIC COAST REGION

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More *Pterodromas* graced our ocean waters, Swainson's Hawks were confirmed wintering in the Central Valley, and Yellow Rail was again found along the north coast. However, amid these highlights were the Region's fifth straight year of drought, and an Arctic blast that set record low temperatures during the last week of December. These events appeared to have a profound effect on local wintering waterfowl populations, distributing them in large numbers over atypical areas. Most striking was how the Big Freeze affected insectivores and nectarivores. The length and severity of the freeze caused massive vegetation and insect die-offs. Many noted the drop in hummingbird, Tree Swallow, and warbler numbers during and after the freeze. Rich Stallcup felt Townsend's Warblers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets in coastal Marin County may have suffered mortality rates in excess of 90%!

Abbreviations: C.A.S. (*California Academy of Sciences*); C.V. (*Central Valley*); D.F.G. (*Department of Fish and Game*); E.O.P. (*End of Period*); 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 Point Reyes Bird Observatory. Place names in *italics* are counties.

LOONS TO CORMORANTS

Inland Pacific Loons were at L. Shastina, *Siskiyou*, Dec. 14 (RE) and O'Neill Forebay, *Merced*, Dec. 30 (RAE). The lone documented Yellow-billed Loon frequented Moss Landing Jan. 10–Feb. 13 (REM, †DR, †m.ob.). A Red-necked Grebe was rare away from tidewater at Overfelt Gardens, San Jose, Dec. 18 (D. Johnson). Roughly 500,000 Eared Grebes were still on Mono L. Dec. 30 (D. Banta, ES). Such large numbers last



lingered into December–January in 1987–1988. The S. Marin CBC total of 536 Clark's Grebes Dec. 29 set a new continental CBC record.

The 1140 N. Fulmars counted from Pigeon Pt. Dec. 29 (BS) established a new high for *San Mateo*. Eight Mottled Petrels from 39 mi w.n.w. of Patricks Pt., *Humboldt*, to 36 mi w.s.w. of Point St. George, *Del Norte*, Dec. 10 were almost expected, but a Murphy's Petrel at the latter location (all †M. Force, T. Staudt) was seasonally unprecedented (see AB 43(3): 400–415 and AB 45(1):146). Flesh-footed Shearwaters offshore *Monterey* Feb. 2 (RLCL) & 9 (DLSh) may have been the same bird. Ashy Storm-Petrel is rare in winter, especially near shore, but one was off Bodega Head Jan. 27 (M. Williams).

Double-crested Cormorants were extraordinarily abundant in *San Joaquin*, with maxima of 1500 at the Stockton sewage ponds Jan. 30 (WRH) and 2200 roosting on Empire Tract Feb. 22 (DGY). The drought and strong shad runs in the San Joaquin R. were possible explanations (DGY). Two Brandt's and three Pelagic cormorants were deep inside south S.F. Bay (PJM, RJR, ES) and another Pelagic was found inland to

Benicia, *Solano*, Dec. 17 (ABtt, G. Karr, V. Coburn).

EGRETS TO DUCKS

A most unusual Snowy Egret with entirely yellow legs was found at L. Earl, *Del Norte*, Feb. 2–3 (ph. ADB). This could complicate identification of young Little Blue Herons! The hybrid Snowy Egret X Little Blue Heron spent its 4th winter at the south end of S.F. Bay (m.ob.). A flock of 90 Cattle Egrets on Bouldin I., *San Joaquin*, Dec. 1 (DGY, WRH) was the only large group noted. The Sebastopol/Santa Rosa Wood Stork remained until Dec. 28 (ph. DN, m.ob.), was seen at Pt. Reyes Dec. 29 (D. Weintraub), and was found dead near Pigeon Pt. Jan. 2 (P. Gandy-Jaureguy, *C.A.S.), a first for *San Mateo*.

Over 47,000 Tundra Swans counted on the Stockton CBC set a new national CBC record. As many as four "Bewick's" Swans wintered in the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta (MJL, SNHG, LJP *et al.*) and another was seen at Pt. Arena, *Mendocino*, Dec. 27 (R. Alexander). An adult and four imm. Trumpeter Swans were present in the Arcata Bottoms Dec. 24–Jan. 6 (S. Miller, †FJB,

†BBA), our only verified report this season. Coastal goose reports included 42 Greater White-fronted, 10 Snow, and 19 Ross' (including a high of 12 in the Monterey area). Two Emperor Geese appeared on F.I. Jan. 25 (†ph. J. Walsh). One stayed through E.O.P. but the other left around Feb. 1 and was probably the same individual that frequented Pt. Reyes Feb. 11–E.O.P. (†PP, m.ob.). Another was found at Colusa N.W.R. Dec. 8 (†MJL). Two Brant and a Barnacle Goose were mixed with Aleutian Canada Geese near Grimes, Colusa, Dec. 19 (RMCM). Was the latter the same bird as in 1985, a new escapee, or are we seeing a pattern here? Stayed tuned.

Eight Eur. Green-winged Teal (including a Eur. X Am. hybrid) reported this winter indicated interest in this form is not dead in the Region. After an absence of 2 months, the ♂ Garganey was present at the Bolinas sewer ponds Dec. 29–Jan. 5 (†DaS, m.ob.). Numbers of Blue-winged Teal (55) and Eur. Wigeon (74 plus two hybrids) were above average. Over 3600 Canvasbacks were found on the Stockton CBC Dec. 15 (fide DGY).

The male Tufted Duck wintering at Rodeo Lagoon, Marin, until Jan. 21 (†D. Cunningham, m.ob.) was thought to be the same bird present at Sutro Baths, S.F., Jan. 18–E.O.P. (m.ob.). A female described from Bouldin I. Dec. 15 (†MJL, MFe) was refound on the Stockton sewer ponds Dec. 18 (†DGY) for only the 3rd or 4th C.V. record. Another female was present at the s. end of Mare I., Solano, Feb. 11 (†DAsh). Three Tufted Ducks were reported without details. Greater Scaup are regular inland at certain reservoirs, but 150 at O'Neill Forebay Jan. 20 (DGY, WRH) was a large number. Inland a ♀ Oldsquaw at the Hwy 16 Trestle Ponds Dec. 22 (MP *et al.*) was Yolo's first, and one at Mono Lake County Park Dec. 30–Jan. 8 (†ES, L. Horn) was the 2nd in that area. The total of 134 Barrow's Goldeneyes reported was down 30% from the previous 2-yr average. A male near Lucerne, Lake, Dec. 2–Jan. 16 (GCo, JRW) and two birds near the Mad R. mouth, Humboldt, Jan. 5–Feb.

7 (†FJB, RLeV, GSL) were in unusual areas. Many observers commented on the abundance of Hooded Mergansers, capped by 150 on Putah Cr., Napa/Solano, Jan. 15 (FGB).

RAPTORS

Twenty-eight Bald Eagles in the Carson R. Valley, Alpine, Jan. 12 included many immatures, and was the largest number in 10 years of coverage (WEH). A Red-shouldered Hawk on the L. Almanor CBC Dec. 18 (HG) was rare in the n. Sierra. Two imm. Broad-winged Hawks began the winter in w. Marin but neither persisted. One in Inverness Dec. 15–16 was last seen before the Big Freeze (RS). The other was in Bolinas Dec. 14 (KH), but its tail and other feathers were found Dec. 31 (DaS, *C.A.S.).

Five Harlan's-type Red-tailed Hawks were reported, two with full details: w. of Los Banos Dec. 7 (†SBT, P. Delevoryas) and on Bouldin I., San Joaquin, Jan. 16 (†DGY). A third

description lacked the observer's name! A very light Red-tailed Hawk at Sargent's Landing, Santa Clara, Jan. 27 (†MMR, JiC) was described better than previous reports of "Krider's," but probably most such birds are unusually pale western Red-taileds. Rough-legged Hawks were generally scarce, with 126 on the Fall R. Mills CBC (BY *et al.*) the only large number reported. Among unprecedented numbers of Merlins wintering in Santa Clara, mostly in urban habitats, last year's ad. ♂ richardsoni returned to Mountain View (MMR).

RAILS TO SHOREBIRDS

A Yellow Rail was found on Samoa Spit, Humboldt, Feb. 10 (†T. Leskew), in the same area and by the same method (flushed by a dog) as one in 1987. Better than in recent years, a minimum of 11 Black Rails in 4 S.F. Bay area marshes were seen, but one was eaten by a Great Egret at Benicia S.P., Solano, Dec. 2 (RLCL *et al.*).

A Lesser Golden-Plover at Bract Tract Dec. 15 (AEn *et al.*) furnished only the 2nd winter San Joaquin record. The Big Freeze was a disaster for Killdeer in Marin (RS) and Humboldt (FJB) as birds found it impossible to obtain food in the frozen ground. Mountain Plovers were absent from Panoche Valley, San Benito, where they normally winter, but made noteworthy appearances elsewhere, with four at L. Shastina, Siskiyou, Dec. 15 (†RE), 70–80 in the San Joaquin Delta Dec. 15–Feb. 3 (AEn, S. & L. Stocking *et al.*), and one at Monterey Bay Academy, Santa Cruz, Jan. 1–4 (DLSu). Two Black-necked

Stilts on F.I. Jan. 2 provided a first island record, and 14 coastal birds from Bolinas Lagoon n. to Arcata Marsh, all after Dec. 30, were unprecedented in winter. Displacement by the Big Freeze is suspected. Three Dunlins at Mono L. Jan. 1–2 (ES *et al.*) were first winter records there. A Ruff was at Moonglow Dairy, Monterey, Feb. 10 (†HG).

JAEGER TO ALCIDS

Four Parasitic Jaegers on the S. Marin CBC Dec. 29 (RS, KH, PP) were surprising, as our entire Region averages about two per winter. Apparently only one Franklin's Gull wintered, an immature at Palo Alto and Milpitas Jan. 26–Mar. 8 (DPM, ph. A. Walther, †WGB). One imm. Little Gull cruised Santa Cruz lagoons and estuaries Dec. 23–Feb. 6 (ph. †PEL, †GFi, †ALE, ph. A. Walther). An ad. gull at the Sunnyvale sewage ponds, Santa Clara, Jan. 10 (†RSTh) may have been a hybrid Herring x Glaucous-winged. Glaucous Gulls broke all our records in S.F. Bay Area counties. A survey of landfills and reservoirs in Santa Clara, Alameda, and Contra Costa tallied 11 immatures (SBT, P. Delevoryas), with a high of three at Contra Loma Res., Contra Costa, Jan. 23 (SBT). Non-survey maxima were up to five at Sunnyvale sewage ponds Jan. 6 & 31 (both PJM) and three at Dillon Beach, Marin, Jan. 12 (LeE, MiW). Seven more were in other coastal counties and Yolo. An adult was near Bodega Bay Feb. 11 (KH). A survey cruise from the Gulf of the Farallones to 50 mi offshore Feb. 14–17 counted up to 200

S.A.

With numerous December–February reports of Swainson's Hawks in the delta region of San Joaquin during recent years, it has been suggested that some actually winter in this area (AB 43:362 & 44:323). This was confirmed in 1990–1991, primarily on Venice and Bouldin Is., and also in portions of Sacramento and Contra Costa (DGY, WRH). Most startling was 28 birds flying into an evening roost on Andrus I., Sacramento, Dec. 1. While this number was not seen subsequently, up to 15 birds were consistently observed scattered over various delta islands through mid-February. Curiously, over 90% of the birds were dark morph adults. Many questions arise; foremost among them are, from where do these birds come and how long have they been wintering? A clue to the latter question may be in their noted behavior of feeding on small rodents behind tractors discing corn fields. Local farmers stated that this winter farming procedure was started in the late 1960s when delta farmers switched to a corn–wheat farming rotation.—DGY



The season's only Franklin's Gull for northern California was this first-winter bird, photographed at Palo Alto on January 28, 1991. Photograph/Alan Walther.



The documented immature Little Gull at Santa Cruz, California, December 23, 1990. Photograph/ Paul E. Lehman.

Black-legged Kittiwakes per day, with both age classes numerous (SFB, M.W. Newcomer, DR).

Only three or five Caspian Terns were reported: one at Stockton Jan. 7–8 (WRH, DGY) and two at Mad R. Estuary, *Humboldt*, Dec. 31 and Jan. 25 (both FJB). Astounding was an Arctic Tern about 3 mi s.w. of Bolinas, *Marin*, on the Dec. 29 CBC (†ASH, M. Elliott, R. Holway). Were not the description from a good and very cautious observer, the report would not be believed. We know of no credible winter or CBC records for Arctic Tern in North America. Ancient Murrelets were numerous in December, but less common later. Maxima in *San Mateo* were 134 at Half Moon Bay Dec. 10 (PJM) and 167 at Pigeon Pt., Dec. 29 (BS).

DOVES TO HUMMINGBIRDS

On the heels of last Season's mini-invasion to the c. coast, a Common Ground-Dove was found at Wilder Ranch S.P., *Santa Cruz*, Jan. 18–24 (DEG, †RAE *et al.*). The lone Burrowing Owl in Livermore, *Alameda*, Dec. 22 was the last known individual in the Livermore Valley (ALE), and epitomized this owl's condition statewide. Many observers have noted its steady decline in recent years, and we encourage everyone to monitor its numbers. The California D.F.G.'s ongoing Spotted Owl census revealed at least 270 pairs within *Mendocino*, *Lake*, *Napa*, *Sonoma*, and *Marin*, with new birds discov-

ered weekly (T. Wooster). Interestingly, the birds have been found nesting in second growth forests as regularly as ancient forests (T. Wooster). Concomitantly, the pair of Barred Owls was seen again at Wheel Gulch along the Big R., *Mendocino*, Feb. 23 (S. Bunnell, K. Roberts), and another was located at Stewart's Pt., *Sonoma*, s. of Gualala, Aug. 3 through the winter (T. Wooster). The latter represents the southernmost conquest of this recent invader to the Pacific Northwest.

Winter reports of Com. Poorwill are annual, but single active birds at Bodega Bay Dec. 25–Jan. 5 (NTC *et al.*) and Dec. 18–Feb. 26 (R. & E. Reid), and another near Bolinas Dec. 28 (†S. Dovgill) surviving the Big Freeze still came as a surprise. A ♀ Costa's Hummingbird in Stockton Dec. 7–Jan. 8 (DGY *et al.*) also stayed healthy, but departed when the flowering eucalyptus trees succumbed. Males were also seen in Modesto during most of January (B. & M. Fleisher, HMR *et al.*) and Los Altos Jan. 30 (PLN).

WOODPECKERS TO RAVENS

Highlighting the six Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers reported this Season were *Del Norte*'s first and 2nd records: an immature in Smith R. Dec. 10–17 (ADB, m.ob.) and an ad. male near Ft. Dick Feb. 8–9 (J. Gartland, ADB, T. Leskew). Among nine Red-naped Sapsuckers was the Mono Basin's first in winter at Lee Vining Dec. 30–Jan. 8

(†ES, m.ob.). *Humboldt*'s 2nd record of Williamson's Sapsucker at Grouse Mt. Feb. 25 (R. Hewit, GJH) came 5 months after its first.

The Region's 3rd winter Least Flycatcher, at Pine L. Park, S.F., Dec. 17–20 (ph. ASH, †SFB, m.ob.) probably did not survive the Big Freeze, while our lone "Western" Flycatcher was at Butte Slough, *Sutter*, Dec. 20 (BED). Another *Empidonax* at Wilder Ranch S.P., *Santa Cruz*, Dec. 13 (DEG) was felt to be a Hammond's/Least type. Winter records of Say's Phoebe from the coast n. of *Sonoma* are few, so one at Arcata Bottoms Jan. 21–22 (FJB) was noteworthy. Another at Mono City Feb. 12 (D. & J. Parker) established the earliest spring arrival for the Mono Basin.

Unlike most of its predecessors, the Region's 7th Dusky-capped Flycatcher made only a brief appearance at Natural Bridges S.P., *Santa Cruz*, Dec. 1–4 (†SA, DLSu). *San Joaquin*'s Tropical Kingbird of the Fall was seen again at Terminous Dec. 15 (MFe, †MJL). Single Cassin's Kingbirds were in *Monterey* at King City Jan. 1 (D. Fisher) and Greenfield Jan. 15–21 (M. Tidwell).

San Mateo became our last coastal county to bring home a Clark's Nutcracker: Portola S.P. Feb 9 (BS). A Com. Raven e. of Stockton Dec. 29 (K. Crump) and two in the Yolo Bypass Feb. 11 (MP) were rare for the C.V. floor.

CHICKADEES TO VIREOS

Single Mt. Chickadees visited the lowlands at McKinleyville Bottoms, *Humboldt*, Dec. 17 (FJB) and Pt. Saint George, *Del Norte*, Jan. 29 (ADB). The White-breasted Nuthatch at Crazy Peak Jan. 20 (ADB, J. Gartland) was only *Del Norte*'s 2nd during the past 7 years. Varied Thrush seemed tolerant of all this "funny weather" as most reporting CBCs showed near average numbers.

The Region's 2nd wintering Gray Catbird pleased many at Pajaro Dunes, *Santa Cruz*, Jan. 1–Feb. 9 (†PJM, †m.ob.). That other crowd-pleasing mimid, the Bendire's Thrasher in Acampo, was last seen Mar. 2 (DGY). For the 3rd year in a



White (or Black-backed?) Wagtail in Monterey County, California, January 10, 1991. Photograph/ Dan Nelson.

row a White/Black-backed Wagtail was between Pajaro Dunes and Moss Landing Nov. 7–Jan. 19 (RMrr, ph. DN, †m.ob.). Many have suggested that these are the same bird, indicating that the bird should be adult; based on this assumption the bird keys out to White Wagtail. However, other expert observers have questioned the age of all birds during the 3 years, leaving the identifications controversial. Our only N. Shrike away from traditional locales was an immature near Solano L. Dec. 16 (WEH, L. Turner). Two December Solitary Vireos (one *cassini*, the other undetermined) were below the recent average.

WOOD WARBLERS TO GROSBEAKS

With a dismal Fall and the Big Freeze, not surprisingly this was one of poorest winters for warblers. Coastally, there was only one Tennessee, eight Nashvilles, 13 Palms, five Black-and-whites, two Am. Redstarts, and three N. Waterthrushes. Most of these and many of the following warblers were not observed past the Big Freeze.

The *Vermivora* highlight was the Lucy's Warbler in Pacific Grove Dec. 27–29 (RFT, DR). Eight Yellow Warblers were seen into mid-December but not thereafter. The ♀ Black-throated Blue Warbler in S.F.

was last observed Dec. 10 (*fide* JM). The lone Black-throated Gray Warbler tallied between the Stockton and Sacramento CBCs summarized their paucity in the C.V. this winter, with Townsend's Warbler reports in the C. V. equally scarce. An oasis in the warbler drought was provided by the Region's first "winter" record of Black-throated Green Warbler at L. Earl, *Del Norte*, Dec. 16–17 (†ADB, †MFRb, LPL, J. Gartland). Very rare Prairie Warblers were at Mad R. County Park, *Humboldt*, Dec. 9–13 (†BA, †FJB *et al.*) and Pilarcitos Cr., *San Mateo*, Dec. 22 (RS). A MacGillivray's Warbler found the comfort of Golden Gate Park, S.F. enough to go the distance Nov. 21–Feb. 25 (ASH, MLR, m.ob.).

Summer Tanager showed well in *Marin* with singles at Inverness Dec. 16–18 (RS) and Bolinas Dec. 29–Feb. 3 (KH *et al.*), and another was in San Bruno Jan. 17–18 (H. Wong). Among W. Tanagers, one warmed up to Golden Gate Park Dec. 12–Jan. 25 (ASH *et al.*), one was found on the Hayward CBC Dec. 16 (*fide* PEG), and up to three were along San Francisco Cr., *Santa Clara*, Dec. 14–17 (PMB). As usual, the Region received a handful of December grosbeaks. Our lone Rose-breasted visited Pacific Grove Dec. 1–3 (W. Hurlbert) while single Black-headed were at Castro Valley, *Alameda*, Dec. 16–17 (RJR *et al.*), Pescadero Dec. 23–30 (PJM *et al.*), Kelseyville, *Lake*, Dec. 30–Jan. 2 (NWh, JRW), and Saratoga Jan. 29 (H. Gerston).

TOWHEES TO FINCHES

A Green-tailed Towhee at San Luis N.W.R. Jan. 4 (L. Cole) was the first C.V. winter record in 6 years. An Am. Tree Sparrow s. of Samoa, *Humboldt*, Jan. 4 (†FJB) was far from regular wintering sites. Fifteen years ago, Clay-colored Sparrows were considered an anomaly. However, wintering Clay-colored Sparrows were again found along the c. coast. This Season saw two birds at Pine Gulch Cr., *Marin*, Oct. 23–E.O.P. (THK, KH, m.ob.) and another at the Half Moon Bay golf course, *San Mateo*,



Clay-colored Sparrow at Half Moon Bay, California, December 12, 1990. Photograph/John Rose.

Dec. 15–E.O.P. (G. Deghi, ph. J. Rose, m.ob.). There were six additional birds sighted in these areas during December–January. Conversely, one would expect our local Brewer's Sparrow to be found somewhat regularly during winter, but one at Pine Gulch Cr. Dec. 15 (AdW, THK) was one of few Regional December records!

In addition to the Sharp-tailed Sparrows mentioned in the Fall report, one at Alameda S. Shore Dec. 31 (G. Gerlach) was from a new locale and one of few for the S.F. East Bay. Fox Sparrows followed the lead from Rufous-sided Towhees last winter as they elicited many comments from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys on their exceptional numbers. In addition to the now annual plethora of coastal Swamp Sparrows reported (55+), three were in the C.V. and one was at Honey L. Jan. 1 (*fide* RNJ). A healthy eight Harris' Sparrows were reported from the coast, C.V., and Great Basin. A "Gray-headed" Junco in Sierra Valley Dec. 16 (†LJ) was the first for *Plumas*, and another was at Tom's Place, *Mono*, Dec. 15 (CDHa). These were only the Region's 7th & 8th during the past decade. However, most outstanding was the state's first documented "White-winged" Junco in San Rafael, *Marin*, "throughout the Period" (CLF, †RS, JW, ph. †SFB). In the Eel R. Bottoms, *Humboldt*, 30–75

Lapland Longspurs Dec. 26–Jan. 16 (FJB) was a noteworthy Regional winter concentration. All three of our Chestnut-collared Longspurs also came from *Humboldt*.

Tricolored Blackbirds put on a good show in *Humboldt* where very rare in winter: up to 12 in the McKinleyville Bottoms Dec. 16–Jan. 15 (BBA, FJB, R. Hewitt) and two at the Redwood Cr. mouth Jan. 17 (FJB, S. Beatty). A Rusty Blackbird at Moss Landing Jan. 13–26 (†SBT, †GKN *et al.*), a Hooded Oriole in Sacramento Dec. 20 (†J. Dick), and six coastal "Bullock's" N. Orioles met their recent winter averages.

The Region's 4th Brambling was very cooperative as it thrilled many in Santa Cruz Dec. 15–Feb. 16 (BBrr, ph. †m.ob.). Wandering Cassin's Finches reached S.F. Bay as two ♀-plumaged birds were in San Rafael Feb. 7 (CLF) and one male was in Berkeley Feb. 21–26 (†HG, PDG). Red Crossbill continued its Fall influx into the c. coast but not elsewhere except for up to 20 in Benicia, *Solano*, Dec. 30–Feb. 11 (S. Beasley *et al.*), a county where there were few records if any. Pine Siskin was noted for its near absence in the C.V. (DGY, TDM).

Addendum: The Red-breasted Merganser at Oroville in *AB* 44:343 was observed on Feb. 19.

Corrigenda: The male Anna's Hummingbird gathering nest material cited in *AB* 44:324 was actually a female with an all-red throat. The breeding Long-eared Owls at M.B.O.S.P. mentioned in *AB* 44:1182 were not a first for that locale. A pair raised three young there in spring 1987. The E. Kingbird at Cloverdale Rd., *AB* 44:1182 was observed July 25–26, not June 25–26. The imm. Ferruginous Hawk near Honcut, *AB* 45:147, was observed Oct. 8, not Aug. 10.

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