

Middle Pacific Coast Region

DON ROBERSON, DANIEL S. SINGER, AND STEPHEN F. BAILEY

The winter began very wet, but then turned mild and dry, contributing to unusual wintering birds, including a smorgasbord of herons and swallows—and even three astonishing Black Terns. Traces of the “montane invasion” of autumn 1996 were also noted throughout the Season.

Abbreviations: C.B.R.C. (*California Bird Records Committee*); C.V. (*Central Valley*); H.S. (*Hayward Shoreline, Alameda*); S.F. (*San Francisco*). Banded birds from Big Sur R. mouth, *Monterey*, should be credited to Big Sur Ornithology Lab. Reports of exceptional vagrants submitted without documentation are normally not published.

Loons to Pelicans

Eight Red-throated Loons and seven Pacific Loons on inland waters, each in 5 counties, were more widespread than usual. Two locations in *Santa Clara* hosted all 3 commoner loon species. Sixty Red-throated and 20 Pacifics on Stone Lagoon, *Humboldt*, Dec. 6 represented a large concentration for an enclosed body of water, albeit one fronting on the ocean (DFx). In marked contrast to recent years, only one Yellow-billed Loon appeared. It was one mi off Pt. Joe, *Monterey*, Jan. 11–Feb. 1 (RT, ADeM, †SFB, DLSh).

Red-necked Grebes also appeared more widespread inland this winter, with singles in *Siskiyou*, *Placer*, *El Dorado*, *San Mateo*, and *Solano/Yolo*.

A Laysan Albatross returned to Pt. Arena

harbor, *Mendocino*, Jan. 3–Feb. 2 (R. Higby, DT *et al.*), making its 3rd consecutive winter there. Although the site's habitat looks ideal for nesting (DR), it is a mainland shore far to the north of this species' tropical nesting islands.

Unusually warm weather in *Modoc* yielded abnormally high numbers of waterbirds at Modoc N.W.R., including \leq two Am. White Pelicans Dec. 5–Jan. 4, a local first in winter (RLR). This species departed *Santa Clara* early, with few remaining in December.

Hérons to Waterfowl

Noteworthy local first winter records included a Least Bittern at the Sacramento Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant, *Sacramento*, Dec. 27 (R. Jones); \leq three Great Egrets at Modoc N.W.R., *Modoc*, Dec. 1–Jan. 10 (RLR); and a Green Heron at Benton Hot Springs, *Mono*, Jan. 18 (E. Gann). Winter's lone coastal White-faced Ibis was at Pescadero Marsh, *San Mateo*, Jan. 3 (BS).

Two “Bewick's Swans” were at Cosumnes R. Preserve, *Sacramento*, Jan. 16–18 (JTr). Ross' Geese reported from unusual locations included the 2nd record for *Trinity*, Jan. 5 (JEH, RH) and \leq three in Shasta Valley, *Shasta*, Feb. 13 (RE). An amazing eight Emperor Geese were recorded during the period, of which only three were documented: one at Bodega Bay from Dec. 12+ (B. Hallet, ph. EDG,



m.ob.) was *Sonoma's* 2nd, while two at the s. spit of Humboldt Bay Dec. 20 (†JCS) were considered the first "chaseable" birds in *Humboldt* since the early 1960s. Most records there have been birds shot by hunters, and indeed it is believed these met the same fate the following morning. *Mendocino's* first was at MacKerricher S.P., Dec. 6 (DT, JRW, ph. †RJK).

A flock of 110 Brant flying S inside S.F. Bay at Burlingame, *San Mateo*, Dec. 21 exceeded the combined total of all *San Mateo* records inside the Bay during the past 50 years (PJM). Several large flocks of "Aleutian" Canada Geese were reported without details. This form is very rare away from known wintering areas, and documentation is important to establish the changing status of this endangered race. Small Canadas with white neck-rings are not automatically *leucopareia*.

Six "Eur." Green-winged Teal included three males at Point Reyes Station, *Marin*, Feb. 25 (RS) and one inland at Cosumnes R. Preserve Feb. 2 (JTr). A Blue-winged Teal x N. Shoveler described from Arcata, *Humboldt*, Jan. 23–24 (RJA, EE, †DFx) was only the 3rd reported in the Region (the first in 1972, also at Arcata).

Eight Tufted Ducks doubled last winter's tally; unfortunately details were submitted for just three. A male at Cosumnes R. Preserve, *Sacramento*, Jan. 14–18 (JTr) represented a rare C.V. record. A ♀ King Eider was near Chimney Rock, Pt. Reyes, Jan. 29–Feb. 16 (GFi, JMR, †LLu, †CLu, GJH). Nineteen Oldsquaws were less than usual; most were around the S.F. Bay area or n. coast, except two at Moss Landing, *Monterey* (DSe, m.ob.) and an imm. male at O'Neill Forebay, *Merced*, Feb. 7 (†DS, DWI).

SA "What might be exceptional and a real signal was the extreme scarcity of White-winged Scoters in *Marin* and *Sonoma* counties. I hope this was a local event (though I haven't witnessed such in 30 years here) and not reflective of a population crash, as is happening with Spectacled and Steller's eiders," wrote Stallcup. *Monterey* observers noted similar declines, causing concern.

Raptors

A Turkey Vulture in Likely, *Modoc*, Feb. 23 was considered weeks early (RLR). Unexpected N. Goshawks included an adult along coastal *San Mateo* Dec. 6 (BS) and an immature at Pt. Reyes Dec. 10 (RS). An imm. Broad-winged Hawk observed flying N along Sweeny Ridge, *San Mateo*, Feb. 9 (PJM) was our lone report. Immature Swainson's Hawks—one in Half Moon

Bay, *San Mateo*, Dec. 15 (†DJP) and one in Mountain View, *Santa Clara*, Feb. 8 (†MJM)—were late and early migrants, respectively, and presumably moving in opposite directions. Two of three "Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawks were documented: one which wintered in *Santa Clara* Dec. 7–Feb. 9 (†MJM, †SCR, DJP) and another near Lincoln, *Placer*, Dec. 21 (†BDW).

Rails to Shorebirds

Black Rail numbers appeared normal after last year's apparent absence at Palo Alto Baylands, *Santa Clara* (m.ob.). Clapper Rails continued to increase in South San Francisco, with 11 there Dec. 27 (HG, m.ob.). Three Sandhill Cranes at Modoc N.W.R., Dec. 19–22 were the first to occur at the refuge between late November–mid-February in the 35-year history of the refuge (RLR). Reports of Pacific Golden-Plover were sparse, with only 11 individuals noted from 3 coastal sites. Mountain Plover numbers continued to decline, with 124 n. of Woodland, *Yolo* (JMR, m.ob.) and 26 in Panoche Valley (*fide* SA) during February (our lowest total in several years). A Pectoral Sandpiper at Staten I., *San Joaquin*, Dec. 14 (†GFi, MPI) was likely a very late migrant, but two along Santa Fe Grade, *Merced*, Mar. 2 (†KMCK) were exceptionally early for spring. The possibility that they overwintered can't be ruled out. To my knowledge the only record of this species "wintering" in our Region was of three in 1982 in *Tulare*, but even these were only seen one day. Considered a high count for *San Benito*, a flock of 150 Com. Snipe Jan. 9 (KVV) near San Felipe L. was a number rarely exceeded anywhere in the Region. The only inland phalarope reported was a Red at L. Shastina, *Siskiyou*, Dec. 5 (RE).

Larids to Alcids

Wintering Heermann's Gulls are not found annually as far north as *Humboldt*. One was at Eureka Dec. 17–Jan. 14 (GSL, SWH).

Two "Kumlien's" Iceland Gulls were reported by experts: a first-basic bird at Luchesi Park, Petaluma, *Sonoma*, Dec. 15 (JM, JLM) and a third-basic bird at MacKerricher S.P., *Mendocino*, Feb. 23 (RS *et al.*). Although the A.O.U. and A.B.A. committees still recognize this species, the C.B.R.C.'s refusal to follow suit and consider records of Iceland Gull has discouraged observers from submitting descriptions.

The Region's 2nd Lesser Black-backed Gull returned to Alviso, *Santa Clara*, Dec. 25–Feb. 22 for its 2nd winter there (MJM, †SCR, AJ). An unexceptional winter for Glaucous Gulls (>22 immatures) featured one or more adults on the n.

coast: in *Mendocino* Dec. 14 (†JRW) and Feb. 17–23 (DT, RS) and at Arcata, *Humboldt*, Jan. 22 (K. Nelson).

Three astounding Black Terns were found in January, the Region's 2nd and 3rd in winter. They were at Harkins Slough, *Santa Cruz*, Jan. 1–2 (PJM, DS), Pt. Reyes Station, *Marin*, Jan. 3–5 (RS, SNGH, KH), and Hollister wastewater ponds, *San Benito*, Jan. 25 (KVV, SDF).

Two ad. and three imm. Black Skimmers wintered at Charleston Slough, *Santa Clara*, near where they have nested beginning in 1994 (PJM, m.ob.).

Check those migrating scoter flocks. A basic-plumaged Horned Puffin with three Surf Scoters flew S past MacKerricher S.P., *Mendocino*, Dec. 13 (†DT).

Owls to Woodpeckers

A Great Gray Owl Jan. 4–late February at 3000' on Round Mt. was one of few records for *Nevada* (D. Lukas). For the first time in several years, Short-eared Owls were widely reported in the interior from *Shasta* to *Placer* and *San Benito*.

SA Although McCaskie *et al.* *Birds of Northern California* (1979) stated that Allen's Hummingbird "has been found in winter [along the coast]" and some are claimed on Christmas counts, I am unable to locate an acceptable record between Sept. 18 (late summer lingerer at a Cachagua, *Monterey*, feeder in 1996) and Jan. 12 (earliest arrival date; 1981 in *Contra Costa*). This season a male Jan. 13 at Ed Levin County Park, *Santa Clara* (MMR), was close to the arrival record, but "probable" or even "positive" (imm. male!) reports in late December were likely of Rufous. The few documented *Selasphorus* from October through the first week of January (specimens, banded birds with rectrix details, or full ad. males) are all Rufous. Even "full-gorgetted"? Rufous may show green backs (Jones, 1992, *North American Bird-Bander* 17: 119–120) and any fall/winter claim of an Allen's in our Region (away from the resident subspecies of Allen's in coastal s. California) will require a specimen, banded bird, or exceptional details (see i.d. material in Heidcamp, 1997, *Birding* 29: 19–29).

Details of a ♂ Black-chinned Hummingbird along Little Panoche Rd., *Fresno*, Feb. 22 (†GFi, †JMR) were suggestive, but since conditions were not ideal, imm. Costa's cannot be excluded. It is questionable whether there are any winter records

for our Region, and the earliest known arrival date is a month later (Mar. 18, 1946; Linsdale, *Condor* 49:236–241). Winter Costa's were present in Willits, *Mendocino*, Dec. 22 (imm. male; S. Harris, †RJK); Folsom L., *El Dorado* (imm. male; B. Mohr); and Del Puerto Canyon, *Stanislaus*, Feb. 27 (ad. male; †JMR, GFi).

Five wintering Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were all adults: Ferndale, *Humboldt*, Dec. 29 (LPL, GSL); Olema, *Marin*, Dec. 21–Jan. 20 (female; TEa, RS); Pescadero, *San Mateo*, Feb. 16–Mar. 1 (male; †AME, RSTh); Ed Levin County Park, *Santa Clara*, all season (male in its 3rd winter here); and near Antioch, *Contra Costa*, 28 Jan. 28–Feb. 6 (†GFi). Male Red-naped Sapsuckers were at L. Berryessa, *Napa* (JCS); near Nevada City Jan. 4 (ECB; first for *Nevada*); and banded at Big Sur R. mouth Feb. 20. Hybrid or intergrade Red-naped x Red-breasted sapsuckers were described from 2 *Santa Clara* sites (†SCR). Most impressive was a ♂ **Williamson's Sapsucker** in Butano Canyon, *San Mateo*, Feb. 2–6 (ph. †BMCK). Vying for *Humboldt's* "bird-of-the-season" was a ♂ **White-headed Woodpecker** at McKinleyville Dec. 21+ (GSL, LPL); a female at Cobb Jan. 7 (J. Knight) was the first in *Lake* away from its n. mountains in 2 decades.

Flycatcher to Shrikes

Two wintering Hammond's Flycatchers at Big Sur R. mouth Dec. 15–Feb. 25 (one banded, one unbanded; JBo) followed last winter's bird there, while others were along the Sacramento R., *Sacramento*, Dec. 18 (TDM) and San Joaquin R., *Fresno*, Dec. 27 (KH). A Dusky Flycatcher was at Half Moon Bay, *San Mateo*, Dec. 15–17 (†DJP, †RSTh), while an E. Phoebe was nearby along Tunitas Cr., Dec. 28 (RSTh). A brilliant ♂ **Vermilion Flycatcher** s. of Hollister Feb. 13–Mar. 3 provided a *San Benito* first (†M. Ninokata & C. Nabeta; m.ob.). Now almost annual, Dusky-capped Flycatchers were at Laguna Cr. Beach, *Santa Cruz*, Dec. 14–Jan. 19 (A. Gaguine, ph. BMCK, m.ob.) and Pine L. Park, S.F., Dec. 16–Mar. 1 (†EDG, JM, m.ob.). A wintering Ash-throated Flycatcher along the Guadalupe R., *Santa Clara*, was present Nov. 30+ (KGH, MMR *et al.*). *Solano's* Tropical Kingbird was still present at Lagoon Valley to Dec. 19 (JCS). Rarer in winter was a W. Kingbird in Santa Cruz Jan. 3–6 (J. Welch, DLSu).

Unseasonal swallows at H.S. included a N. Rough-winged and a Cliff, both Jan. 14 (RJR). Another Rough-winged at Redwood Shores, *San Mateo*, Feb. 7 was almost our earliest migrant ever (RSTh);

only a Feb. 4, 1984, record from *Merced* is earlier. Barn Swallows made big news this winter: At least 15 were in 8 coastal and Bay Area counties from late December to mid-January, including \leq five over Harkins Slough, *Santa Cruz*, Jan. 1–2 (CKf, PJM, DS) and *Contra Costa's* first winter record at Shell Marsh Jan. 16 (SAG), well before the first spring arrivals in late February.

Could a flock of a dozen or so Pinyon Jays at Pt. Reyes Station, *Marin*, Dec. 22 (†RS) have been related to the fall's corvid invasion? Late-reported components from the Clark's Nutcracker incursion included *Napa's* first and second Nov. 6 & 28 (†J&V Tuteur *et al.*). During this season, nutcrackers wintered in \geq 5 counties, including \leq 13 at Jacks Peak, *Monterey* (TEa *et al.*), and one in downtown Fresno Jan. 9 (*fide* KH). Common Ravens are rapidly expanding into new areas, from coastal *Monterey* (DR, SFB) to Bobelaine sanctuary, *Sutter*, Feb. 9 (D. Williams), while Chestnut-backed Chickadees of the rufous-flanked nominate race continue their progress down the w. slope of the Sierra, recorded Jan. 4 at Grass Valley, *Nevada* (HG). Red-breasted Nuthatches were conspicuous "everywhere" after their fall flight. A Pygmy Nuthatch at Weaverville, *Trinity*, Jan. 5 (DFx) was in a county where its status is poorly understood.

Our interior lowlands held widespread Mt. Bluebirds, including 55 at Merritt I., *Yolo*, Dec. 26 (uncommon there; DS, DW) and unprecedented numbers w. of the Salinas R., s. *Monterey*, all season (J&HBa). A N. Mockingbird was still present near the edge of its range at Grenada, *Siskiyou*, Jan. 17 (RE). Winter Sage Thrashers were at Pt. Reyes Dec. 24 (RS) and near Davis, *Yolo*, Dec. 25–Feb. 8 (TDM, m.ob.). Triplets of Bohemian Waxwings in *Modoc* Jan. 19 (DS) and in Lava Beds N.M., *Siskiyou*, Feb. 17 (BDP) were the only ones found this winter. Northern Shrikes were fairly widespread e. of the Sierra, but outliers were w. and s. to Napa Feb. 16 (immature, †Murray Berner; 2nd for *Napa*) and Tyler I., *Sacramento*, Dec. 6 (TEa).

Vireos to Sparrows

Two "Cassin's" Solitary Vireos wintered in our Region (in *Santa Cruz* and *Sonoma*), about par for the season, but a chance to document the first wintering "Blue-headed" form in California was lost in *Santa Clara* when the report was merely phoned into a BirdBox and no details were received. Caution is particularly warranted because fresh fall/winter "Cassin's" can be very bright. Few "Plumbeus" Solitary Vireos have wintered in our Region, but one was studied in Golden Gate Park, S.F., Dec. 26 (PJM).

Wintering Lucy's Warblers were in Pacific Grove Dec. 27–Jan. 30 (SRv, CHO, m.ob.) and along Branciforte Cr., *Santa Cruz*, Dec. 19–Jan. 13 (DLSu); we now expect a couple each mild winter. A puzzling warbler in terrible weather at Center-ville, *Humboldt*, Dec. 29–Jan. 3 (RLeV *et al.*) was eventually claimed as a Cape May, but no details were received. More spectacular was a "yellow-lored" **Yellow-throated Warbler** in Ferndale, *Humboldt*, Dec. 29–Feb. 8 (GSL, †GjH *et al.*). Other scarce wintering warblers, all coastal or Bay Area unless specified, were two Tennessees (both in *San Mateo*; RSTh), seven Nashvilles, 14 Yellows (including five Dec. 27 at L. Merced, S.F.; PJM), 24 Palms (one with a band at Big Sur R. mouth Feb. 3, where B.S.O.L. has not banded one since October 1995; JBo), six Black-and-whites (including two in *Sacramento*), two N. Waterthrushes (one Nov. 24–Dec. 12 at Alviso, *Santa Clara*; MMR), and the other Dec. 13–Jan. 6 at Bodega Bay, *Sonoma* (BDP), one Am. Redstart (Dec. 27 in Hatton Canyon, *Monterey*; NMCM), one MacGillivray's (Jan. 31 at Natural Bridges S.P., *Santa Cruz*; SG), and five Wilson's. The ♀ **Hooded Warbler** found in San Jose Nov. 28 remained to Feb. 2 (†SCR, †AME *et al.*).

Five Summer Tanagers were scattered between S.F. and Pacific Grove, *Monterey*; a female in Palo Alto was present for its 3rd winter (MMR *et al.*). Wintering grosbeaks were divided between two Rose-breasteds and four Black-headed; the Rose-breasteds were at Pt. Reyes Station Dec. 9–15 (RS) and Half Moon Bay Jan. 28–Mar. 1 (G. Deghi *et al.*). A *l*-type Lazuli Bunting was along the Guadalupe R. above Montague, *Santa Clara*, Dec. 18–Jan. 19 (†JCS, MMi), and a *l*-type Indigo was described from Gazos Cr., *San Mateo*, Jan. 4 (†SCR); either is exceptional in winter. Scarce Green-tailed Towhees wintered along the Cosumnes R., *Sacramento*, Dec. 27 (WRH, AEn); at Graton, *Sonoma*, Jan. 23–24 (H&E Best); and at Zmudowski S.P., *Monterey*, Jan. 11 into March (MSu; DR, RC, DSg *et al.*).

The only Clay-colored Sparrows this season were in *Humboldt*, lower Salt R., Dec. 29 (R. Hoyer) and Arcata Dec. 21–Jan. 1 (GjH *et al.*). A rare Black-throated Sparrow spent late November into February at a feeder near Cosumnes R. College, *Sacramento* (G. Ewing). The only Lark Bunting was in Panoche Valley, *San Benito*, Feb. 8–Mar. 1 (ADeM *et al.*). "Red" Fox Sparrows were reported from 5 locales; details received all suggested *zaboria* (breeds interior Alaska to s. Manitoba, winters s.c. United States) rather than

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nominate *iliaca* (breeds n.e. North America, winters s.e. United States), no matter the label chosen by observers. The two wintering Harris' Sparrows were in Walnut Cr., *Contra Costa*, Dec. 6–Feb. 4 (M. Stern, †GFi) and Livermore, *Alameda*, Jan. 12–25 (ALE *et al.*). A “Gray-headed” Junco, rarely reported here, was along the Cosumnes R., *Sacramento*, Dec. 27 (WRH, AEn).

Longspurs to Finches

Like last winter, a single McCown's Longspur was along Brewer Rd., w. *Placer*, Dec. 3 (JTr). Winter Lapland Longspurs may be semi-regular in the northeast—e.g., two at Butte Valley, *Siskiyou*, Dec. 1 (DS, DW) and 12 at McArthur, *Shasta*, Dec. 21 (B&CY)—but they were rare at Tyler I., Dec. 6 (two, TEa; a *Sacramento* first) and Elkhorn Slough, *Monterey*, Jan. 1 (PJM).

Winter Yellow-headed Blackbirds were unusual near Sheridan, *Placer*, Jan. 18 (BDW; first seasonal record there) and Moss Landing Feb. 22+ (RF). The only Rusty Blackbird was along Volta Rd., n.w. of Los Banos, *Merced*, Feb. 17 (†B. Principe).

The fall Cassin's Finch invasion continued unabated with ≥ 41 birds in 10 coastal and Bay Area counties from *Mendocino* (†CEV) to *Monterey*. Highlights included a female banded at Big Sur R. mouth Oct. 30 recaptured 3 times until Feb. 24, and *Napa's* 2nd record at a Napa feeder Dec. 9–Jan. 7 (†J. Maillard). More visited feeders on the floor of the C.V. in *Yolo* (JMH) and *Sacramento* (LED, TDM). The autumnal influxes of Red Crossbill and Evening Grosbeak also continued, but in much reduced numbers. Winter appearances of Lawrence's Goldfinch, scarce and unpredictable, included ≤ 22 at Granite Bay, *Placer*, Dec. 28 (BDW), three in Bollinger Canyon, *Contra Costa*, Jan. 26 (J. Robinson), eight at Henry Coe S.P., *Santa Clara*, Dec. 14 (*fide* WGB), and a small flock in Carmel Valley, *Monterey*, Dec. 28 (SHa).

Addenda and Corrigenda

Last Summer's Pacific Loon in *San Benito* was not the county's first (see AB 47:296). Two Am. Golden-Plovers in *Humboldt* were June 27–28, 1996, not July 27–28 as reported in AFN 50:993. Omitted from the Summer report were two Gray Catbirds banded in *Humboldt*: July 1 near Orick and July 2 at Lanphere Dunes (both *fide* CJR). Given the three banded in *Monterey* in late June–early July, what happened with this species? Documentation for the “nesting pair” of Cedar Waxwing near Calpine, *Sierra*, included an actual nest, but it was not the first for the Sierra Nevada. McCaskie *et al.* (1979) lists a

breeding record for Bucks L., *Plumas*, in 1973 (*fide* DS).

Cited contributors and sub-regional editors (in boldface): R.J. Adams, Steve Allison, Stephen F. Bailey, Jim & Helen Banks, **William G. Bausman**, Edward C. Beedy, Jim Booker, Rita Carratello, Al DeMartini, **Bruce E. Deuel**, Todd Easterla, Leo Edson, Arthur L. Edwards, Alan M. Eisner, Ray Ekstrom, Elias Elias, Andrew Engilis, Mike Feighner, George Finger, Sam D. Fitton, **David Fix**, Rick Fournier, Steve Gerow, **Steve A. Glover**, Edward D. Greaves, **Helen Green**, Keith Hansen, Stanley W. Harris, Syd Harrison (SHa), Gjon Hazard, Rob Hewitt, Kevin G. Hints, Craig Hohenberger, Waldo R. Holt, Steve N.G. Howell, Joan M. Humphrey, **John E. Hunter**, Alvaro Jaramillo, **Robert J. Keiffer**, Clay Kempf, **Robin L.C. Leong**, Gary S. Lester, Lauren P. Lester, Ron LeValley, Cindy Lieurance, Leslie Lieurance, Michael J. Mammoser, **Timothy D. Manolis**, Jennifer L. Matkin, Bert McKee, Kevin McKereghan, Nancy McMahon, **Peter J. Metropulos**, Mark Miller, Joseph Morlan, Benjamin D. Parmeter, Marge Plant, David J. Powell, **Jude Claire Power**, C.J. Ralph, Jean M. Richmond, Robert J. Richmond, **Don Roberson**, Mike M. Rogers, Stephen C. Rottenborn, Steve Rovell, **Ruth A. Rude-sill**, **Ronnie L. Ryno**, Barry Sauppe, Dennis Serdehely (DSe), Debra L. Shearwater, Dave Shuford, Daniel S. Singer (DSg), Rich Stallcup, John C. Sterling, **Emilie Strauss**, **David L. Suddjian**, Mac Sutherland, Richard Ternullo, Ronald S. Thorn, Dorothy Tobkin, **Kent Van Vuren**, Chuck E. Vaughn, Denise Wight, **Jerry R. White**, **Brian D. Williams**, **Bob & Carol Yutzy**; m.ob.= many observers. Many more contributors were not specifically cited, but all are appreciated.

—Stephen F. Bailey (*Loons to Frigates, Jaegers to Alcids*), Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, 165 Forest Ave., Pacific Grove, CA 93950; Daniel S. Singer (*Hérons to Shorebirds*), c/o Arroyo & Coates, 500 Washington St., Ste. 700, San Francisco, CA 94111; Don Roberson (*Doves to Finches*), 282 Grove Acre Ave., Pacific Grove, CA 93950.