# middle pacific coast region



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Y et another El Niño gathered strength offshore. Onshore, the spring was rather dry, and dry-country sparrows dominated the landbird news (see discussions of Black-chinned, Black-throated, and Grasshopper sparrows). The "bird-of-the-season" was also a sparrow (q.v.). Alas, intriguing reports of Kentucky Warbler and Common Grackle were received without details and will not be published; this is the norm for reports of exceptional vagrants submitted without documentation. This general rule extends to claims of firsts for counties; the few included here carry the "no details" comment. Observers should assure their interesting finds are adequately documented. Abbreviations: C.B.R.C. (California Bird Records Committee); C.V. (Central Valley); S.F. (San Francisco); W.A. (Wildlife Area). Banded birds from Big Sur R. mouth, Monterey, should be credited to Big Sur Ornithology Lab.

# LOONS TO SHEARWATERS

Over 200 Red-throated Loons off Ft. Ord Apr. 26 (DR, DSg, ASH, DWm) represented an exceptional concentration for Monterey, though they were staging in their preferred habitat of shallow water over sand. An ad. Com. Loon on Paicines Res. May 25 was the first in spring for San Benito (DLSh). A striking migrant was an alternate-plumaged Yellow-billed Loon passing Pigeon Pt., San Mateo, Apr. 24 (†BMcK, BS, †FrT). Four alternate-plumaged Horned Grebes at Ukiah sewage ponds May 3 was an unusual group inland in Mendocino (RKJ, CEV, DAE, JRW). A Red-necked Grebe at Mendota W.A., Fresno, Mar. 8 (B. Widowson) was very rare in the San Joaquin Valley. May 9 was a late date for four Red-necked Grebes tarrying at Bodega Bay, Sonoma (DN).

The Laysan Albatross at Pt. Arena harbor was last reported Mar. 25-29 (GS, BDP). A Laysan Albatross rescued from a street in South San Francisco Apr. 24 (fide J. Moghler) was the 3rd spring bird onshore in San Mateo. Some inland Laysans appear to have ridden ships into the Port of Oakland and then were evicted, but recurring onshore records suggest that some arrive unaided. Offshore, three Laysans off Santa Cruz May 16 (DLSh, JiD) and four off Monterey May 20 (SFB) reflected this albatross' continued increase off our coast. This year's first Flesh-footed Shearwater was off Monterey May 24 (DLSh, JiD). Manx Shearwaters continued to be regular in Monterey Bay, with singles off Monterey Apr. 5 (RT) and at Seabright Beach, Santa Cruz, Apr. 16 (†BMcK).

# HERONS TO WATERFOWL

Nesting Am. Bitterns created excitement in Santa Clara, where 2 nests discovered in May (SCR) represented the first known breeding since 1937. In adjacent San Benito,

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an individual in Hollister Mar. 12 (JLx, DLSh, ADeM) was considered just the 2nd county record this century, but was quickly followed by another in Hollister Apr. 13–20 (DLSh, ADeM), displaying and pumping; breeding was later confirmed. Is the species increasing locally, or has it been overlooked in past years? Either way the news is encouraging. It is likely that more rainfall throughout this decade has resulted in increased potential breeding habitat at the same time that more observers are covering areas formerly ignored or overlooked. Two White-faced Ibis at San Felipe L., May 27 (SCR) made a rare *San Benito* record.

At least 11 dark-morph Ross's Geese were carefully scrutinized at Lower Klamath N.W.R., Siskiyou, March 8-9 (†WEH, JTr), among a flock of an estimated 40,000 Ross's. The wintering Emperor Goose at Bodega Bay, Sonoma, lingered until Apr. 30 (m.ob.). The "Aleutian" Canada Goose continues its remarkable recovery from near extinction in the early 1960s, with upwards of 24,000 tallied in n.w. Del Norte March 15 (M. Fisher). A pair of Blue-winged Teal bred successfully in Marin, where seven ducklings were noted at the Olema Marsh during the last week of May (RS). Sixty-five Surf Scoters at L. Mendocino, Mendocino, May 3 (RJK, CEV, JRW) was an amazing total at an inland location, and begging the question of just how many of these "sea ducks" actually migrate over the interior of our Region. A male Barrow's Goldeneye at the Big Sur R. mouth, Monterey, May 22-23 (†TN, RC, JBo, †DR) represented only the 2nd time this species has been recorded along our coast between May and November. One observer saw it do head-back courtship-like displays, evidently "just for practice" since there were no other goldeneyes around.

#### RAPTORS

A pair of Bald Eagles discovered nesting at Ft. Hunter-Liggett, Monterey, was the county's first since 1934. A previous report pertained to nests just over the county line in San Luis Obispo (AFN 50:327-328). Political boundaries aside, the Ventana Wilderness Sanctuary reintroduction program appears to be taking hold; this Season's nest included a banded, VWS-released female, which recruited a wild, unbanded male. Red-shouldered Hawks at an occupied nest Apr. 13 in Trinity marked a breeding first for that county (JEH, GjH). A Ferruginous Hawk in s. Monterey Apr. 21 (†SFB, J&HBa) was later by 3 weeks than any previous year there.

## SHOREBIRDS

Migrant Pacific Golden-Plovers were noted at Pigeon Pt., San Mateo, where five passed between Apr. 3-26, and one was at the Salinas R. mouth, Monterey, Apr. 26. At least 19 Solitary Sandpipers detected Regionwide between Apr. 8-May 19 was a good showing; these were more or less evenly divided between the coast and interior. A Curlew Sandpiper at Palo Alto, Santa Clara, Apr. 14 marked the 2nd consecutive spring-but only 2nd spring record-for this species in our Region. Subtle differences in structure led the observer to speculate that perhaps it was a different individual than the one he found nearby last year (†SCR). Two Semipalmated and four Baird's sandpipers between Apr. 20-May 12 was an average showing, but two well-described Pectoral Sandpipers seen and heard along Santa Fe Grade, Merced, March 3 (KMcK) suggested possible overwintering. Spring migrants are unknown before mid-April.

#### LARIDS TO ALCIDS

A total of 36 Pomarine Jaegers passing Pigeon Pt. Apr. 3–4 (PJM, BMcK, RSTh) was a high 2-day count from shore in spring. A South Polar Skua 12 mi off the Monterey Pen. May 24 (DLSh, SNGH) provided only about our 11th record in spring, when this species is more regular off s. California.

Three Franklin's Gulls in Santa Clara Apr. 13–29 and four in Marin in May (fide RS) represented a normal total, but none was reported from the Klamath Basin. Of three Mew Gulls lingering to the end of May, the surprise was an adult at Bolinas Lagoon, Marin (KH). Coastal "Ring-billed Gulls" away from estuaries are usually misidentified California or Mew gulls. Even though single Ring-billed Gulls at Mac-Kerricher S.P., Mendocino, May 3 (RJK) and Big Sur R. mouth May 12 (JBo) were at small estuaries, they were still rare along these long rocky coastlines.

"Kumlien's" Iceland Gulls were reported from the same 2 sites as the previous season, but spring's both wore first-basic plumage. One at Lucchesi Park, Petaluma, Sonoma, Mar. 15 (JM, N. White) was believed likely the same bird seen there Dec. 15 (†JM), but another at MacKerricher S.P., Mendocino, Mar. 11 (†RJK, DAE, CEV, DT) was 2 years younger than the bird seen there Feb. 23 (RS). Alviso's Lesser Blackbacked Gull remained to Mar. 22 (NLe). Three of 12 Glaucous Gulls that lingered into March or early April were older birds: an adult at Eureka, Humboldt, Mar. 4 (GSL), an adult at Schollenberger Park, Sonoma, Mar. 8–15 (A. N. Wight, m.ob.), and a sub-adult at Trestle Ponds, Yolo, Apr. 5 (GEw, BDW). Two ad. Sabine's Gulls inland at Shasta Valley W.A. Apr. 20 provided the 2nd spring record for Siskiyou (RE). An oiled ad. Sabine's Gull visited Bolinas Lagoon, Marin, May 10 (RS, LLu, CLu).

Elegant Terns returned to *Monterey* earlier than ever, except 1987: one over Zmudowski pond Mar. 29 (TAm) and four at Elkhorn Slough Apr. 12 (G. Meyer), where a rare migrant Least Tern appeared Apr. 26 (DSg, DR, ASH, DWm). Thirty Black Terns at San Felipe L. Apr. 26 set a new record number for *San Benito* (KVV, CT).

The five Black Skimmers resided at Charleston Slough, Santa Clara, through May 8, when they moved to neighboring areas (m.ob.). On Apr. 27 single skimmers were at Brooks I., Contra Costa (SAG), and Pajaro R. mouth, Monterey (C. Rodgers), and four sat on a beach at Princeton Harbor, San Mateo, May 18 (AJ).

Single alternate-plumaged Marbled Murrelets were out of place, but not unprecedented, at Brooks I., Contra Costa, Mar. 15 (SAG) and off the Big Sur R. mouth Apr. 23 (GePh). Two alternateplumaged Ancient Murrelets sojourned late May 31 near Pt. Reves (RS, LLu, CLu). A Rhinoceros Auklet at a burrow entrance on Green Rock, Humboldt, Apr. 26 (TWL) suggested prospecting a new breeding site, yet only 1-3 Tufted Puffins were seen at this traditional but dwindling puffin colony (GSL, LPL, TWL). Horned Puffins appeared along our coast from San Mateo north. One flew N past Pigeon Pt. Apr. 10 (SAG). Singles in Mendocino were at MacKerricher S.P. May 25 (S. Snyder) and Pt. Arena Cove May 29 (†DT). Six Horned Puffins were found dead on Pt. Reves Great Beach, Marin, May 26-June 2 (RS et al.); live birds were found nearby at Drake's Beach (†ES, m.ob.) and Chimney Rock (RS, m.ob.); and Horned Puffin visited F.I. about this time (fide RS). The causes of May-July Horned Puffin wrecks remain mysterious.

## **OWLS TO HUMMINGBIRDS**

A Spotted Owl n. of Orick, *Humboldt*, was apparently killed and eaten by a pair of Barred Owls Mar. 14 (†TWL); the range expansion of the latter owl continues to cause problems for the endangered bird, not limited to genetic swamping. Additional Barred Owls found during the spring were at Richardson Grove, s. *Humboldt*, and near Hayfork, *Trinity* (J. Seeger, K. Young). A vagrant Long-eared Owl was on outer Pt. Reyes, *Marin*, Mar. 20 (RS).

There are no *Humboldt* records of Lesser Nighthawk, but a silent nighthawk at Arcata Apr. 14 (EE) must have been this species, given the date (Commons don't arrive until late May). Likewise, an out-ofrange nighthawk at Marina, *Monterey*, Apr. 26 (RFT, JSo) was presumably a Lesser.

Two Black Swifts in a huge feeding flock of swifts over Alamo, Contra Costa, Apr. 19 (IMR) were inexplicable. In our Region, Black Swifts arrive after mid-May, but our files contain a few mysterious mid-April reports. Could these be migrants from the Canadian population, which can arrive by late April (Campbell et al., 1990, Birds of British Columbia, Vol. 2)? White-throated Swifts entering a hole in a rocky cutbank on Alder Bluffs Rd. May 5 provided the first nesting evidence for Trinity (C. Secor), less than 2 mi from Humboldt, where there are no breeding records. Widely dispersed Costa's Hummingbirds included males n. to Redding, Shasta, Apr. 22 (CY); near Eureka Apr. 23 (B. Hawkins); and Killgore Hills Apr. 13 and Horseshoe Ranch W.A. May 8-19, both Siskiyou (RE).

Among apparent hybrids reported this spring were a female Anna's x Costa's Hummingbird along Pescadero Cr., San Mateo, Apr. 13–24 (†BMcK), a Red-breasted x Red-naped Sapsucker in Sacramento Mar. 15 (TDM), and an apparent Tree x Barn Swallow at Blue L., Humboldt, Apr. 16 (†GjH). Caution is warranted, because while Barns have hybridized with Cave and Cliff swallows (Auk 97:148–159, Condor 77:362–364), there is apparently no report of a pairing with Tree (and it's hard to hypothesize how this could occur).

#### WOODPECKERS TO KINGLETS

Late dates of wintering Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers at Pescadero and Ed Levin Park, Santa Clara, were Mar. 1 (RSTh) and Mar. 11 (JMS), respectively, while Humboldt's vagrant White-headed Woodpecker at McKinleyville was last seen Mar. 21 (GSL). An Olive-sided Flycatcher on Underwood Mt. Road, Trinity, Apr. 13 was quite early for the northwest (GjH et al.). Rare E. Phoebes were at Coyote Pt., San Mateo, Mar. 4-17 (RSTh et al.) and Shady Oaks Park, Santa Clara, Mar. 2-15 (MJM et al., a returning bird missed earlier in the winter), but a late May claim for Colusa was undocumented. Strangely, Dusky or Willow flycatchers have provoked claims of late spring/summer E. Phoebes (note a published account of Oregon's first nesting of "E. Phoebe" in *Oregon Birds* 7:88–91); in this Region details will be required. A Say's Phoebe in El Granada, *San Mateo*, May 29 was very late (BS).

A male Vermilion Flycatcher briefly brightened the Carmel R. mouth May 29, for the 4th Monterey record (JBo, GePh et al.). Lingering winter flycatchers of note were a Dusky-capped Flycatcher in S.F. to Mar. 22 (ASH) and an Ash-throated near San Jose to Mar. 16 (MMR). Cassin's Kingbirds farther north than usual included six near the Pajaro R., San Benito, Apr. 8-11 (nesting; †SCR); Santa Clara's first recorded nest on San Felipe Rd. from Apr. 13 on (†SCR); and one at Pt. Reyes lighthouse May 23 (RS), which Stallcup stated was the first "sanitary" Marin record since a 1972 nesting effort. Western Kingbirds were also over-represented, with 47 at Gazos Cr. mouth May 4 (AJ) eclipsing all prior San Mateo single-day counts. A Bank Swallow over the Garcia R. flats, Mendocino, May 15 (†DT) was a county rarity, while about 50 were at Sacramento's only remaining colony on Rossmoor Bar Apr. 2 (EDG).

After the fall/winter montane invasions, remnants lingered into spring. Among these were Clark's Nutcrackers in Monterey on Cone Peak Mar. 16 (PEG) and Jack's Peak all season (DHpt); in San Benito on San Benito Mt. to May 9 (DLSh, ADeM); and in San Mateo on Butano Ridge May 2 (DLSu). Wandering Yellow-billed Magpies far from regular locales included two in Solano Mar. 9 (Vallejo and Mare Is.; J. Lentz) and one near Carneros, s. Napa, Apr. 20 (P. Burton). The spread of Com. Raven in n. Monterey accelerated with first records from many sites on the Monterey Pen. and Big Sur coast (DR, JBo et al.), and a nest on San Juan Grade (ADeM, DLSh). Additional evidence of rayen range expansion came from a Metcalf Rd., Santa Clara, nest (SCR) and an Alamo, Contra Costa, pair during March (JMR). Numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches declined through spring, but some lingered in the lowlands. The last wintering Ruby-crowned Kinglets usually go by early May, but one singing along Butano Cr., San Mateo, May 28 was remarkably late (DLSu).

#### THRUSHES TO DICKCISSEL

Most winter wandering Townsend's Solitaires left by mid-March, but exceptions were on San Benito Mt. to May 9 (†DLSh, ADeM), and vagrants appeared at Piper Slough, *Contra Costa*, Apr. 26 (M. Havman) and outer Pt. Reyes May 17 (M. Lichen). A Phainopepla over a Sacramento yard Apr. 10 (TDM) was rare on the C.V. floor.

**SA** A mated pair of **Bell's Vireos** at a likely nest site near Gilroy May 13-28 (ph. †SCR) provided Santa Clara's first breeding evidence since 4 eggs were collected in 1932 [W.E. Unglish, Condor 39:39-40; another published report of a banded bird (W. Birds 19:10) proved erroneous (R. Mewaldt, fide WGB)]. Intensive efforts to revive the population of this endangered subspecies in s. California may send more potential colonizers our direction. Meanwhile, efforts to reduce cowbird parasitism (the biggest current hurdle facing this species now that habitat is badly fragmented) resulted in the removal of some 150 cowbirds along the Salinas R., Monterey/San Luis Obispo border, an area that also hosted a Bell's Vireo nest in the last decade (JBo).

Vagrant Red-eyed Vireos were at Princeton Harbor, San Mateo, May 18 (RSTh); Big Sur R. mouth, Monterey, May 29 (JBo); and Golden Gate Park, S.F., also May 29 (ASH). The Big Sur R. mouth also had two Tennessee Warblers (May 9 & 26, the former bird banded), three N. Parulas in May (plus another three in June; JBo, CHo, DR, RC), and two Chestnut-sideds (May 17 & 25), adding to its luster as a premier site for spring rarities. San Mateo had a Tennessee at El Granada May 31 (BS) and a N. Parula on San Bruno Mt. May 31 (PJM). A rare spring Magnolia Warbler was at Trinidad S.P., Humboldt, May 29 (TWL). Six Palms, four Black-and-whites, and four Am. Redstarts (some of each were lingering winterers) seemed about average for spring. Rarer Ovenbirds were on Pt. Reyes May 18 (RS) and Elk Head, Humboldt, May 27 (TWL). Four MacGillivray's Warblers along Gazos and Butano creeks Mar. 31 were very early (BMcK). The wintering Hooded Warbler near San Jose was last seen Mar. 12 (SCR, †AME).

It was an excellent spring for both Yellow-breasted Chats and Blue Grosbeaks, riparian-loving species which have been on the decline in our Region. Some 48 migrant chats were banded at Big Sur R. mouth after Apr. 14, and nesting evidence was obtained at previously unknown sites in *Santa Clara*. The latter county also had its first presumed nesting pair of Blue Grosbeaks in Ed Levin Park from Apr. 19 on (MMR et al.), plus three widely scattered birds. Elsewhere, a singing male was on territory in San Benito Apr. 26 (KVV, CT); 5 territories were located in s. Monterey in May (J&HBa, JBo, RFT), and 2 more on Patterson Pass Rd., Alameda (R. Cimeno). Rounding out these grosbeak records were three at Piper Slough May 8 (GFi) and one near Hensley L., Madera, May 4 (SAG). Four Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were located in Monterey and San Mateo (the latter included a winterer to Mar. 30). More interesting was a female Dickcissel in a Pescadero yard Apr. 6–17 (†P. M. Saraceni, m.ob.).

For Black-chinned, Blackthroated, and Grasshopper sparrows, "it was a very good year" (hum Sinatra as you read this). Singing Black-chinneds were present at all sorts of new places in Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Stanislaus, although breeding evidence was obtained only in the first county. Singing birds were near Hume L., Fresno (SAG), and at the Red Mt. trailhead, Trinity (GjH), in early May, providing data from poorly known locales. The only sour note was an apparent loss of a disjunct northern population on Gunsight Ridge, Siskiyou, after the last singing bird there May 18 (RE). Black-throated Sparrows were recorded from such diverse locales as Paicines Apr. 15 (ADeM; potential first for San Benito, no †); the Killgore Hills, Siskiyou, May 16 (RE); and Black Point, Mono, May 24 (ES). But most astonishing were singers on the Sierran w. slope. In fall 1992, the Cleveland Corral fire burned 40,000 acres in El Dorado N.F. In late May, four males were on territory in Crystal Basin along Granite Springs Rd., El Dorado (WEH, GFi). Although the Black-throated Sparrow sometimes exhibits dramatic (and temporary) range expansions, its apprearance was unexpected. Similar nesting evidence from the w. slope was obtained only in 1974 (Butte), 1984 (El Dorado), and 1985 (Tulare). The incessant buzz of Grasshopper Sparrows was heard in exceptional numbers throughout the coastal range from Humboldt to Monterey (m.ob.), with outliers to the w. Yolo foothills and Cosumnes R. Preserve, Sacramento, May 24 (JTr).

# **SPARROWS TO FINCHES**

The only Clay-colored Sparrow was at a Sebastopol, Sonoma, feeder Apr. 10 (RoM). A rare coastal Brewer's Sparrow was along Pilarcitos Cr., San Mateo, May 18 (RSTh).

Scarce spring Lark Buntings turned up on Crabtree Rd., Stanislaus, Apr. 27 (HMR) and near Half Moon Bay, San Mateo, May 10 (RSTh). But the rarest of all was a singing **Le Conte's Sparrow** at L. Earl, Del Norte, May 21–25 (ADB, †DFx, ph. MMR et al.).

The drum beat of Great-tailed Grackles moving N pounded on with six more in Monterey Apr. 7-May 27 (KVV, SRv, GePh, JMa et al.), and males in Yosemite Valley, Mariposa, Apr. 6 (S. Recilo) and Mesa L., Sacramento, May 2 (LEd). Left-over Cassin's Finches from the fall/winter incursion were stranded from San Benito Mt. (to May 8; ADeM, DLSh) to feeders in Pacific Grove, Monterey (AB), and Hayward and Oakland, Alameda (all in mid-March; KGH, JSL). Likewise, Red Crossbills lingered on the coast or in piney lowlands (breeding can be expected), and unseasonal Evening Grosbeaks were reported widely into mid-May. Unrelated to the montane invasion, Lawrence's Goldfinches appeared in unusually high numbers, with nesting pairs in coastal Monterey and San Mateo, scattered birds n. into Mendocino and Trinity (where they are scarce; RJK, DT, GjH et al.), and around the C.V. foothills of Yolo, El Dorado, and Calaveras (SCH, WEH, JCV et al.).

#### CORRIGENDA

The Laysan Albatross that has been faithful to Pt. Arena harbor during the past few years was first seen Feb. 27, 1994 (JBo), one year before it was reported to us. Two warbler comments in AFN 50:994 need amendment. Breeding Bird Atlas work is proving that MacGillivray's Warbler is rather widespread and local (not "rare") in the coast ranges of San Mateo/Santa Cruz, and the nesting Com. Yellowthroats cited were in San Mateo (not Santa Clara).

Cited contributors and sub-regional editors in boldface: Tim Amaral, Stephen F. Bailey, Alan Baldridge, Jim & Helen Banks, Alan D. Barron, William G. Bausman, Big Sur Ornithology Lab, Jim Booker, Rita Carratello, Jim Danzenbaker, Al DeMartini, Damien A. Ebert, Leo Edson, Ray Ekstrom, Alan M. Eisner, Elias Elias, Gil Ewing, George Finger, David Fix, Steve A. Glover, Phil E. Gordon, Edward D. Greaves, Helen Green, Steve C. Hampton, Keith Hansen, W. Edward Harper, Dave Haupt, Gjon Hazard, Kevin G. Hintsa, Craig Hohenberger, Alan S. Hopkins, Steve N.G. Howell, John E. Hunter, Alvaro Jaramillo, Robert J. Keiffer, Robin L.C. Leong, Tom W. Leskiw, Gary S. Lester, Lauren P. Lester, Nick Lethaby, Ron LeValley, Cindy Lieurance, Leslie Lieurance, Jim Lomax, John S. Luther, Michael J. Mammoser, Timothy D. Manolis, John Mariani, Roger Marlowe, Bert McKee, Kevin McKereghan, Peter J. Metropulos, Joseph Morlan, Dan Nelson, Todd Newberry, Benjamin D. Parmeter, Gerard Phillips, Jude Claire Power, Harold M. Reeves, Jean M. Richmond, Don Roberson, Mike M. Rogers, Stephen C. Rottenborn, Steve Rovell, Ruth A. Rudesill, Barry Sauppe, Debra L. Shearwater, Daniel Singer, John Sorensen, Jean Marie Spoelman, Rich Stallcup, Emilie Strauss, Grace Steuer, David L. Suddjian, Chris Tenney, Richard Ternullo, Ronald S. Thorn, Robert F. Tintle, Dorothy Tobkin, Francis Toldi, John Trochet, James C. Vallely, Chuck E. Vaughn, Kent Van Vuren, Jerry R. White, Brian D. Williams, David Wimpfheimer, Bob & Carol Yutzy. Many more observers were not specifically cited, but all are appreciated.

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Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *Field Notes* are keyed on page 837.