

Field Notes

(December 2018-January 2019)

by Pete Dunten

Greater White-fronted Goose through White-faced Ibis

At least one **Greater White-fronted Goose** frequented Shoreline Park between 4 Dec and 24 Jan (m. ob.). The high count was four at the Shoreline kite-flying area on 3 Jan (WBr, JL). Three were found at Palo Alto Baylands on 2 Jan (CnB), 4 Jan (BM), and 27 Jan (DBp, JSu). Single 'speckle bellies' were also on the north VTA mitigation pond on 11 Dec (RJ) and at Arzino Ranch on 12 Jan (AR).

High counts of **Cackling Geese** included four at the north end of Coyote Valley on 7 Dec (KON, WP), seven at Penitencia Creek Park on 16 Dec (AVe), three at Arzino Ranch on 25 Dec (SPv), and six at Noble Park in the Berryessa neighborhood of San Jose near Penitencia Creek Park on both 22 Jan (WP, KON) and 26 Jan (SPz, GRy). One of the seven was a smaller "minima" Cackling Goose. The only other "minima" was first noted 29 Dec in Coyote Valley near Laguna Ave (RPh). Small numbers of **Snow Geese** frequented the margins of SF Bay between 11 Dec and 7 Jan. The high count was four at Arzino Ranch on 4-5 Jan (RJ, SPz, WP, KON) and flying over the Don Edwards NWR EEC on 7 Jan (BLL, VLL). Further afield, three Snow Geese were present at Calaveras Reservoir on 16 Jan for the San Jose CBC (TO), five were at Guadalupe River Park on 29 Dec (SPz), and one joined the geese in Coyote Valley between Bailey Ave and Laguna Ave on 3 Jan and 5 Jan (KP, BM, GL). The last of the geese to arrive was **Ross's Goose**. One visited Byxbee Park on 31 Dec (JHy) and one was on Alviso salt pond A10 on 26 Jan (RJ, MJM, MMR). Two groups of **Tundra Swans** overflow neighborhoods in southwest San Jose. A bevy of ten passed over the Almaden area on 29 Dec (THa) and a whiteness of

eight flew over the Cambrian area on 12 Jan (AVe). One to two **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** are wintering at the north VTA mitigation pond again this year. One was spotted on 7 Dec (RJ) and two were found on 21 Dec (MDo). Another was found on San Tomas Aquino Creek near Hwy 237 on 22 Dec (KON, WP). A **Eurasian Green-winged Teal intergrade** (KG) joined the group of teal on the VTA mitigation pond on 23 Dec (KG). A solo **Long-tailed Duck** on Alviso salt pond A15 graced the San Jose CBC on 16 Dec (MMR) and stayed through 25 Dec (SPv). Long-tailed Ducks are found in the county roughly two years in every five. **Redhead** counts reached record levels this winter, with 3075



Summer Tanager by Karen Burnson

Redhead on Alviso salt pond A11 on 26 Dec (SCR) and 4058 on ponds A10 and A11 on 26 Jan (MMR, MJM, RJ). A single male **Barrow's Goldeneye** and a male **Barrow's x Common Goldeneye** both visited Shoreline Lake beginning in mid-November. On 2 Dec a male Barrow's Goldeneye moved to nearby pond A1 (BM). A female was found on Alviso salt pond A11 during the San Jose CBC on 16 Dec (SCR). Two different male Barrow's x Common Goldeneye hybrids were on Shoreline Lake through the period (m. ob.). **Brown Pelicans** remained in the area in good numbers, with 42 counted at Shoreline Lake

on 14 Dec (RPh). A flock of thirteen **Cattle Egrets** flying over Saratoga on 6 Dec were the first record for the year (RPh). Their destination - unknown. Cattle Egrets occur annually in the county; the last year Cattle Egrets were missed was 1986. Single **White-faced Ibis** visited Alviso salt pond A16 on 5 Dec (LC) and 16 Dec (ST) and nearby Alviso Slough on 25 Dec (ErS).

Swainson's Hawk through Barn Swallow

A **Swainson's Hawk** over Newby Island on 18 Dec was the first record in the county for December (AR). **Snowy Plovers** were concentrated on Alviso salt pond A12 on 26 Jan, when 72 were tallied during a census (RJ, MJM, MMR). Single

Ruddy Turnstones were sighted on 7 Dec at Gold St and Elizabeth St in Alviso (MDo) and on 20 Dec at salt pond A12 in Alviso (WGB). Turnstones are least likely in winter, though they can be found in the county in any season. A count of fourteen **Sanderling** on A12 during the San Jose CBC on 16 Dec was a nice tally (SCR, MMR). **Black Skimmers** favored locations further north in SF Bay this winter; all sightings in the South Bay were of single birds. One was seen at Shoreline Lake on 1-2 Jan (WGB, RJ, GL, EdG) and one was at salt pond A16 on 26 Jan (RJ, MJM, MMR), while as many as 61 were at the Foster City shell bar in San Mateo county during the period. The only report of **Short-eared Owls** this winter came on 19 Jan when a pair were courting along Marsh Rd (WP, KON). High counts of **White-throated Swifts** are possible in the winter when large numbers gather at dusk to roost together. The count of 290 over Coyote Valley OSP on 2 Dec was exceptional (STu). Not long after the beginning of the new year our first spring migrants arrive, well ahead of the vernal equinox. The first **Allen's Hummingbirds** was spotted on 23 Jan at McClellan Ranch Preserve (GL), followed on 24 Jan by two in a Mountain View neighborhood and two at Whisman Park (both MDo). A quiet

Field Notes *cont'd*

tap-tap-tapping this time of year may be the first clue a sapsucker is wintering. Fresh sap wells are another clue, often revealed by other small birds, the hummingbirds, kinglets and warblers attracted to the insects which are drawn to the sap. Finding a sapsucker is only the first challenge. Sorting out which species or hybrid is present is the second. A few of the sapsuckers spending the winter with us have been cooperative, returning to the same trees repeatedly. A **Red-naped Sapsucker** at Guadalupe Creek along Hicks Rd has been present from 2 Jan through the end of the period (WP, KON, m. ob.). Another was found during the Palo Alto CBC in Monte Bello OSP on 17 Dec (DPy). **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were present at four locations. The immature found at the Santa Clara Valley Water District headquarters on 23 Oct remained at least through 27 Jan (GRy). The immature at Ulistac NA first noted on 26 Oct stayed through at least 10 Jan (PLa). Two more immature Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were discovered during the period, one at Lake Cunningham present between 8 – 16 Dec (WP, KON) and one at Hellyer CP on 29 Dec (VT et al.). A **Cassin's Kingbird** at Los Gatos CP on 2 Jan (BM) was a nice find. Late December brought flocks of **Tree Swallows**, with forty over Byxbee Park on 26 Dec (JD) and 25 over Lake Cunningham on 6 Jan (WP, KON). **Violet-green Swallows** outnumbered Tree Swallows over Lake Cunningham on 6 Jan (WP, KON) when 100 were present. A flock of eighty Tree/Violet-green Swallows over the Coyote Creek Field Station on 26 Dec were too distant to identify (DWn). For the third winter in a row, **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** were found in December, with one at Lake Cunningham on 16 Dec and two along the Penitencia Creek Trail on 26 Dec (both GL). **Barn Swallows** were found early in the winter, with two at Lake Cunningham on 9 Dec (BLL, VLL), two at Almaden Lake Park on 11 Dec (BM), one over Charleston Slough on 14 Dec (SPv, RT), three along Clayton Rd near Mt Hamilton on 5 Jan (WP, KON), and one at Lake Cunningham on 16 Jan (KON).

Pygmy Nuthatch through Cassin's Finch

Sixteen **Pygmy Nuthatches** at Cuesta Park in Mountain View on 14 Jan was

a record high count for the park (GL). A small number of **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** stayed for the winter. One was noted at Santa Teresa CP on 12 Dec (PL, EvM) and 22 Dec (MFa), three were along Arroyo Hondo on 16 Dec (PDu), and one was heard along the Mule Trail on Mt Hamilton on 2 Jan (BMa). Two **Townsend's Soli-**



Summer Tanager by Brooke Miller

taires near Loma Prieta were a nice surprise on 29 Dec during the Calero-Morgan Hill CBC (BBz). The **Mountain Bluebirds** along Laguna Ave in Coyote Valley since 17 Nov stayed into the first week of December. A male was last seen on 2 Dec (JWm) and a female was still present on 3 Dec (JSt). Both **Phainopeplas** found in late November remained into January. The Phainopepla at Almaden Quicksilver CP was found through 9 Jan (JD) and the Phainopepla at Guadalupe Oak Grove Park through 26 Jan (STu). Additional sightings were of single birds in Stevens Creek CP on Charcoal Rd on 23 Dec (MPy) and along Guadalupe Creek near Via Lugano on 13 Jan (BLL, VLL). Phainopeplas are rarely found as far west as the Stevens Creek CP location in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The sighting along Guadalupe Creek was a good example of the "Patagonia rest stop effect," wherein the discovery of one rare bird (a Summer Tanager in this instance) leads to more discoveries soon thereafter. A **Nashville Warbler** along San Francisquito Creek near Stanford was a nice find on the Palo Alto CBC on 17 Dec (WBr, JL). A **Blackburnian Warbler** along Coyote Creek near Silver Creek Valley Rd was only the sixth record for

the county. First seen on 2 Dec (JPa), the warbler remained through 9 Jan (JRg, KBy). **Yellow Warblers** are found during winter in four of every five years. This winter one was along Coyote Creek above Silver Creek Valley Rd on 14 Dec and 7 Jan (both PDu) and another was at Ulistac NA on 17 Dec (JRu). The remarkable number of

Palm Warbler reports that began on 21 Oct continued into December and January. Six reports between 2 Dec and 14 Jan came from the vicinity of Byxbee Park (WGB, MMR, NM, WBr, GL) and one sighting on 27 Jan came from Whisman Park (FV). The five **Black-throated Gray Warbler** sightings were about average for the winter. Single warblers were found at West Valley College on 6 Dec (OA), Blackford Elementary on 16 Dec (RJ), San Francisquito Creek near Stanford on 17 Dec (WBr, JL), Rancho San Vicente in New Almaden on 17 Dec and 21 Dec (JPa, KB), and along Guadalupe Creek near Via Lugano on 25 Dec (BH). A **Hermit Warbler** graced a Mountain View neighborhood on 4 Dec (MDo), and a **Wilson's Warbler** enjoyed Ulistac NA on 15 Dec (JTr). **Chipping Sparrows** were present at TJ Martin Park through winter after arriving on 7 Nov (JPa). The high count was twelve on 5 Jan (BM).

cont'd on page 8

Field Notes *cont'd*

A **Grasshopper Sparrow** was near Santa Teresa CP's Stile Ranch trailhead on 18 Dec (JPa). Two Grasshopper Sparrows photographed at J Grant CP on 25 Jan (SPz) added a rare record for the Diablo Range in winter. The **Swamp Sparrow** found at Isabel Ranch on 2 Jan during the Mt Hamilton CBC was another rare record for the Diablos (MMR, MJM). Swamp Sparrows were found at eight locations in December and January, a remarkable number. Two **Summer Tanagers**, both males, delighted many observers. The first, an adult, was discovered on 23 Jan near Guadalupe Mines Rd and Lavender Creek (JPa). It was still present on 19 Jan (JPa). The second, an immature, was found at Vasona CP on 9 Jan (SLC) and has remained through January (PLa). **Western Tanagers** were found at eight locations, with two at Whisman Park on 28 Jan (MDo, ABr) and the remainder all singletons. A **Black-headed Grosbeak** has spent the winter at a feeder in San Jose's Dry Creek neighborhood (JaJ). The location is unfortunately outside the local CBC count circles. Three

Bullock's Orioles in December and January placed this winter in the top quartile of the 25 years with records. They are absent during winter about four years of every ten. One at the Sunnyvale Golf Course contributed to the Palo Alto CBC on 17 Dec (DbJ), one along the Penetencia Creek Trail participated in the Calero-Morgan Hill CBC on 29 Dec (MSm), and one at the Santa Clara Valley Water District headquarters on 19 Jan (JPa) was too late to join the counts. An **Evening Grosbeak** recorded calling at West Valley College on 4 Dec (OA) was the first and only record this winter. A **Cassin's Finch**, a bird of the Sierra Nevada, was found on the Mt Hamilton CBC on 2 Jan along San Antonio Valley Rd near Skye Ranch (JWg). Cassin's Finch is rare this close to the coast in winter, with fewer than ten records in the county.

Observers: Ozzie Altus (OA), Keith Bailey (KBy), Bonnie Bedzin (BBz), Cynthia Berg (CnB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Andrew Bradshaw (ABr), Will Brooks (WBr), Daniel Bump (DBp), Karen Burnson (KB), Lilian Chou (LC), Jim Dehnert (JD), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Pete Dunt-en (PDu), Marion Farber (MFa), Ed Gasi-

rowski (EdG), Kevin Gin (KG), Tom Hamel (THa), Bob Hirt (BH), John Hurley (JHy), Deborah Jamison (DbJ), Richard Jeffers (RJ), Jane Jordan (JaJ), Barry Langdon-Lassagne (BLL), Virginia Langdon-Lassagne (VLL), Peter LaTourrette (PLa), Garrett Lau (GL), Susan LeClair (SLC), Jasen Liu (JL), Patricia Lynch (PL), Nateri Madavan (NM), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Bruce Mast (BMA), Eve Meier (EvM), Brooke Miller (BM), Tom Olson (TO), Kitty O'Neil (KON), Kathryn Parker (KP), Janna Pauser (JPa), Sergey Pavlov (SPv), William Pelletier (WP), Devin Peyton (DPy), Sergio Perez (SPz), Ryan Phillips (RPh), Michael Pyle (MPy), Jason Riggio (JRg), Alex Rinkert (AR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Judy Rudolph (JRu), Gordon Rydquist (GRy), Marc Simmel (MSm), John Sterling (JSt), Eric Storms (ErS), Joanna Suits (JSu), Jason Tanner (JTr), Vivek Tiwari (VT), Steve Tracey (ST), Ryan Treves (RT), Steve Tucker (STu), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AVe), James Weigand (JWg), John Weismuller (JWm), Dan Wenny (DWn), multiple observers (m.ob.)

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