

THE YELLOWBILL



Programs

May 12, 2009: Don Roberson, Bird Identification

Don Roberson will present an illustrated identification talk about the “Ten Most Misidentified Birds in Monterey County.” Don has been reviewing bird records for 30+ years for *North American Birds* magazine, for his books like *Monterey Birds*, and now for eBird. He spent a dozen years on the California Bird Records Committee. He’s noticed certain trends in what birds gets mistaken for something else. When we mentioned that the talk was actually in Fresno, he said “oh my, I’ve misidentified the venue -- I don’t know nuttin’ about birding in Fresno. Maybe Fresno birders occasionally visit the coast?” In any event, he promised that there would be only a couple seabirds, and that he would have tips on landbird ID that might interest birders from beginning to advanced.

Meetings are held in the Calaveras Room on the first floor of the UC Center at 7:30 PM (550 E. Shaw Ave).

Fieldtrip Schedule

WEEKEND FIELD TRIPS

- April 18: Tulare County shorebirds with Gary Woods & Tulare County Audubon, 567-6005.
- April 25: Wind Wolves Preserve with Gary Potter.
- May 16: Woodlake, Dry Creek, & Drum Valley with Tulare County Audubon.
- June 20: Sierra Nevada meadows.
- July 18: Grant Grove with Tulare County Audubon.

WEDNESDAY WALKS

- April 7 (Tues): Parkfield, Ken & Betty, 439-2267.
- April 14, 15, & 16: Morongo, Kay Barnes, 787-2985.
- April 22: Watts Valley, Kay Barnes, 787-2985.
- April 29 & 30: Kern River Valley, Ken and Betty.
- May 6: Squaw Valley, Jim Warner, 905-9563.
- May 20: Shaver Lake, Frank Gibson, 299-8452.
- June 3: Beasore Rd., Lynn Hemink, 434-0850.

GIVING BACK OR BIRDING WITH A PURPOSE

by Chuck Peck

I think it is safe to assume that everyone who belongs to Audubon enjoys watching birds. For many of us some of our best memories are associated with watching birds. Seeing an avocet for the very first time or watching a great egret catch and swallow a fish so big that you couldn’t believe it could fit down that long narrow throat. Maybe it was adding that 100th or 200th or 300th bird to your life list. For everyone the memories of what birds have added to our enjoyment of life are different but in many ways the same. Being a member of Audubon helps keeps us in-

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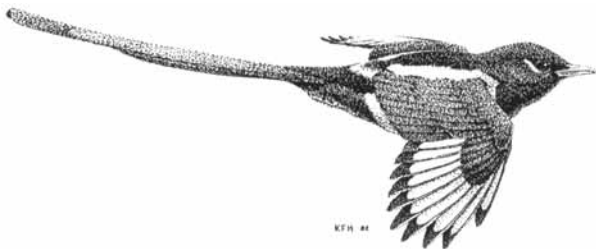
Bewick's Wren - Gary Woods

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The mission of Fresno Audubon Society is to promote the enjoyment, understanding and preservation of birds and other wildlife in Fresno and Madera Counties through birding, education, science, advocacy and fellowship.



FRESNO-MADERA BIRDS

by Jeff Davis

Including reports for the period of
February 16 to March 15, 2009

A male **Blue-winged X Cinnamon Teal** at the Madera Wastewater Treatment Plant March 5 (ph. PF) was the first such hybrid reported in our area. Only 65 male **Ring-necked Pheasants** were found during a January survey at Mendota WA, down from nearly 300 a couple of years ago (*fide* FG). Two pheasants encountered during a visit there March 10 were therefore considered significant (FG, MH, SB). A **Cooper's Hawk** that landed near a large nest in a tree on the Fresno State University campus March 9 may have been the nest owner (FG, MH); this species seems to be nesting in Fresno in increasing numbers. Migrant **Swainson's Hawks** begin arriving in our area at the end of February, but one over the AAL February 20 (ph. GW) was early. Although rarely detected, **Mountain Plovers** regularly winter in and migrate through our area. Flocks of 22 and 24 were observed in western Madera County pasturelands March 9 and March 13, respectively (GW). Our first-of-season **Whimbrel** was one at Mendota WA March 11 (GW).

An adult **Mew Gull** was at the Fresno Wastewater Treatment Plant February 26 (JSe, JSt, JLu, JLo); this species is now an expected winter visitor at the plant's water clarifiers. Fresno County's first record of a **Western Gull** was of a first-cycle bird (ph. GW) at the AAL February 26 (GW, JSe, JSt, JLo, JLu). Also there on that day were 40 **Thayer's Gulls**, a possible "**Kumlien's**" **Island Gull** (ph. GW), 40 **Glaucous-winged Gulls**, and two first-cycle and one second-cycle **Glaucous Gulls**. At least one **Glaucous Gull** was still present there February 28 (GW, LH). Wednesday Walkers were treated to a first-cycle **Glaucous-winged Gull** at the Fresno Slough March 11 (*fide* LH). Good gulling wasn't restricted to Fresno County though. Madera County's first **Glaucous-winged Gull** (a first-cycle bird) and second **Thayer's Gull** (an adult) were at the Fairmead Landfill February 25 (JSt, JLu, JLo). The **Thayer's Gull** was still present February 27 (JD), and the **Glaucous-winged Gull** was still there March 5 (PF).

An adult male **Rufous Hummingbird** at Ahwahnee (LC) February 14 represents our earliest record by 8 days. A female **Downy Woodpecker** at Mendota WA March 11 (FAS *fide* FG) was a good find as this species is scarce so far onto the valley floor in Fresno County. Our first **Western Kingbird** of the season was one near Riverdale March 13 (JSe), and our first **Cliff Swallows** were near Kerman February 20 (GW). A **Rock Wren**, first observed in a northeast Fresno neighborhood October 5, continued through the period (JD). A **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** at Fresno City College February 26 (RO) provided one of very few records of this species from urban Fresno. First-of-season orioles were a male **Bullock's Oriole** along Little Panoche Road and a male **Hooded Oriole** at Mercey Hot Springs February 11 (FAS *fide* FG; ph. JR). The highlight of the season and one of the most unexpected birds to ever be reported in Fresno County was an adult male **Common Redpoll** that graced a sock feeder in a northwest Fresno yard March 12 (ph. ST - see page 4 for more details). Our first **Lawrence's Goldfinches** of

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Giving Back . . . continued

formed about bird populations and the threats that imperil them. Audubon was formed in early part of the last century by people concerned by the destruction on the heron and egret rookeries of Florida and other parts of the Gulf Coast by people gathering feathers to adorn ladies hats. The first wildlife refuges were created by Congress to protect those rookeries and the first wardens were hired by Audubon because the government did not appropriate money to hire wardens. Some of those wardens were former plume hunters and at least one was murdered for his work in protecting the rookeries. Through the years Audubon has responded to threats to birds by rallying its members on the political front and by public education.

But there is another way Audubon has been at the forefront of efforts to save birds and that is by citizen science. The most obvious citizen science have been the Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys. This slow accumulation of data all across the US and Canada over many decades by ordinary citizens is of particular importance now with the threat of global climate change. Many scientists have mined this data for trends that are only obvious over long periods of time.

There are some other ways that you can participate as a birder and citizen scientist now and give back to bird conservation for some of the pleasures you have received from birds. California Audubon is conducting surveys on tri-colored blackbirds and long-billed curlews every year. You can help. For more information check out the website at www.ca.audubon.org. Click on Bird Science and then on Citizen Science. This could be particularly important for our part of the Central Valley because our part of the valley is always underrepresented in these types of surveys with the results that scientists looking at the raw data assume there is nothing here and conservation dollars are directed elsewhere. At the recent Audubon assembly in Asylomar, I noted that a talk on tri-colored blackbirds did not mention any nesting sites in Fresno County even though they have nested regularly at the Mendota Wildlife Refuge. I also noted Cal Audubon's important bird areas does include the Merced Grasslands but does not extend down into Madera and Fresno County even though biologically there is no difference and I regularly see flocks of long-billed curlews using our grasslands. Let's not blame the Audubon scientists for these omissions. Let's blame ourselves for not reporting to them and for not advocating for the importance of the Madera and Fresno grasslands to the birds of our own backyard.

Another way to use your birding skills to help protect birds in our local area is to volunteer to do bird surveys on protected lands owned Sierra Foothill Conservancy and the San Joaquin River Parkway. When those organizations write grants it really helps to have hard data proving that these lands are important to birds. We know they are but the organizations need numbers and dates to add weight to our opinions. I know that Black Mountain is an important rest and feeding stop for migrating song birds every single year and in particular for warblers. It would be wonderful to have counts throughout the migration period for several years in a row. Breeding bird surveys would also be a great help.

So give someone a call and offer your skills and time. After all, you would still be birding and your bird lists would be invaluable over time to the organizations that work so hard to protect the habitat of the creatures that have provided you with so much pleasure over the years.

April & May Field Trips

by Frank Gibson

On Saturday, April 18th, Gary Woods will lead us to Tulare County, and we will meet with some of the local folks, who will show us the current spots where plovers and sandpipers are being found at the height of their spring migration. We will be on the look-out for many birds to be passing through: Semipalmated, Snowy, and Black-bellied plovers; Whimbrel and Lesser yellow-legs; and Willets. Least and Western sandpipers and Dunlin and Long-billed dowitchers will still be here, some in their little-seen breeding plumage. Forster's and Caspian terns and Lesser Nighthawks should be back. This trip will last most of the day and will likely involve little walking.

On Saturday, April 25th, Gary Potter will lead us to the Wind Wolves Preserve in the Kern County foothills, where we'll find a different suite of birds at the height of migration. When down in that area, keep an eye to the sky for the slowly increasing California Condor! We'll be looking for the population of Common Ground-Doves that is resident in orange groves just below the preserve, but may see Swainson's Hawks; Golden Eagles; Common Poorwill; Vaux's and White-throated swifts; Warbling Vireos; Nashville, Townsend's, MacGillivray's and Wilson's warblers; Yellow-breasted Chats; all three goldfinches; and an amazing eleven flycatchers! Then there are the hummingbirds: Anna's, Costa's, Calliope, Rufous and even Allen's come through the Preserve in April. If time allows, Gary plans to make a detour into Bakersfield to look for the resident Rose-ringed Parakeets and nesting Hooded and Bullock's Orioles. This trip will be all day, with a fair amount of walking in the preserve.

On Saturday, May 16th we will visit the Tulare County foothills and meet up with some local experts to look for late spring birds and wildflowers. We will start by scoping Bravo Lake for Osprey, pelicans, grebes, and other water birds. Then we'll head for Badger by way of Sentinel Dome and Elderwood, looking for Rock and Canyon wrens, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Lewis' Woodpeckers, Lawrence's Goldfinches, and wildflowers. Next we'll look for bluebirds, nuthatches, titmice, wrens, woodpeckers, and sparrows in Eshom Valley, east of Badger. Then on to Hartland, seeking Steller's Jays, Winter Wrens, and Mountain Chickadees. Depending on the weather and what we have seen, we may return to Woodlake by way of Dry Creek Road, which is one of California's loveliest byways, or return to Fresno more directly through Pinehurst and Squaw Valley.

Meet at the old Fresno Ag parking lot at Gettysburg and Blackstone about 6:45. We will carpool as much as possible and head out at 7:00 sharp! It is important that we leave on time, as we will have a way to go on both days and want to be at our birding spots while the birds are still active! Dress in layers and bring a lunch, your bird book, binoculars, scope, and radios if you have them, and lots of enthusiasm! See you there!

Tripping Over to the Panoche Hills

by Frank Gibson, with thanks to Jill Rucker

The Fresno Audubon Society headed out early from the old Fresno Ag Hardware parking lot at Blackstone and Gettysburg Avenues, with five cars full of 14 eager birders. Lynn Hemink drove while Bev Brock lead the way to our first stop in Kerman (for breakfast for Frank, they said), then through Mendota and on to west Fresno County. We stopped at the Little Panoche Detention Dam and scoped the Wildlife Area. Not much! Lynn spotted a Canvasback, which all saw, a Cinnamon Teal, which some saw, and a moorhen, which few saw. The swallow flock over the dam was more productive, with Violet-green, Northern Rough-winged and Cliff among the Tree Swallows. It sounded like four million and two Tricolored Blackbirds were roosting in the reeds across the lake. Fortunately some few flew up so that all could see them.

We went through the backcountry of the Panoche Hills, stopping to scan for roadrunners without success, and checking the sparrow flocks along the road. Mostly White-crowns, with a few Lark and Savannahs, and a Vesper or two. Three of us spotted a Burrowing Owl on a hillside, but it had ducked into its hole by the time everybody got back to look. A bit later, our first Western Kingbird of the year was found on another hillside. Someone found Song and Lincoln's Sparrows along Little Panoche Creek. Penny Stewart spotted a Bullock's Oriole along the creek. The Nuttall's Woodpecker of the day was by the creek, and a couple of us got to see a well-hidden Merlin there, as well as a pair of Mallards and a Great Egret.

Before lunch we hit Mercey Hot Springs to see a couple of Long-eared Owls roosting. While there, we got really great looks at a Bullock's Oriole and Lynn found a small flock of Lawrence's Goldfinches. Our one robin of the day was there, too. It still wasn't lunch time yet, so we tripped up the hill into the BLM's Natural Area looking for Sage Thrashers and Sage Sparrows. Double dip! We had lots of mockingbirds singing, Lark Sparrows and White-crowns, but not much else. We had lunch up on the hills, then tooled down the road to Panoche Valley. Before we reached Shotgun Pass, Bev radioed that they had a Prairie Falcon in the air. We all watched it as it soared around showing off its dirty armpits for several minutes.

In the Panoche Valley, Jill Rucker stopped to photograph a bunch of Bullock's Oriole nests hanging in a tree at a private residence. We stopped at the Panoche Inn for a restroom break, where Lynn pointed out a leucistic House Sparrow. We saw a Brown-headed Cowbird among Tricolored and Brewer's Blackbirds, and two Anna's Hummingbirds. Down past the school we found a pair of Cassin's Kingbirds. The remainder of the trip was quiet while all kept an open eye out for a Mountain Plover in the recently plowed fields, but no such luck. At the end of the trip, we saw Northern Rough-winged Swallows checking out holes in a cliff near I-5 as everyone split up and headed home. We were sure dusty when we arrived back at Fresno Ag, but some added new lifers and First Of Season birds to their lists. What a beautiful day! And it doesn't hurt to have such great guides and leaders either! Thanks Bev and Lynn!

Common Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*) seen in the Fresno Area!

submitted by Sue Thorson with Jeff Davis



Location. Backyard feeder in northwest Fresno (948 W Fairmont Ave), Fresno County, California

Date. March 12, 2009
Time. ~ 12:30 PM

Observer. Sue Thorson, 948 W Fairmont Ave, Fresno, CA 93705, (559) 222-5620, sthorson@sbcglobal.net

Duration of observation. ~2 minutes

Habitat. Suburban backyard in older neighborhood with mature trees.

Circumstances. A sock feeder filled with Niger seed hangs within 12 feet of my patio sliding door and attracts many goldfinches. On Thursday, March 12, 2009, at the time of the observation I was standing by the door enjoying the goldfinch feeding activity when I noticed a bird hanging on the feeder much as a goldfinch does. But it had a red patch on its head and was brown with light streaks and some red on its breast. Because of the red coloration my first thought was House Finch. But because the bird was so small I immediately realized that it was not a House Finch. I had never before seen a bird like that. Wanting to document it, I backed slowly away from the door, went to the kitchen, and grabbed my Canon Power Shot S5 with 12X optical zoom lens. I approached the glass slowly so as not to disturb the birds who tend to flush at the slightest unfamiliar movement, and then snapped as many shots as I could while the bird was still there, which was, perhaps 2 minutes from my first observation until it was gone.

Since my daughter had taken ornithology in college, I emailed her one of the images and asked her what she thought it was. She wrote back quite soon:

"It doesn't look familiar...unless maybe it's a Common Redpoll...they hang out with other "finches" sometimes....you have a lot of activity the waxwings are nice to see....see, there's something good about fresburg!!!"

I then looked up the Common Redpoll on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds website. The page on redpolls showed their range well to the north and not anywhere near California, let alone as far south as Fresno. So, my first thought was to send the image to the Fresno Audubon Society for verification. Jeff Davis immediately responded by email with very exciting news. Jeff Davis wrote back, in part:

"Wow! Hi, Sue. That sure looks like a Common Redpoll -- an exceptional bird anywhere in California and especially this far south..."

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Fresno-Madera Birds - cont.

the season were at Finegold Creek Preserve north of Millerton Lake March 6 (GW). And 100+ **Evening Grosbeaks** at Musick Meadow February 19 was a large number, especially given recent reports of range-wide population declines in this species (JT).

Cited Observers: Steve Brueggemann, Laura Colton, Jeff Davis, Pete Fahey, Frank Gibson, Fresno Audubon Society (Wednesday Walkers), Lynn Hemink, Margaret Houck, Jim Lomax, John Luther, Rodney Olsen, Jill Rucker, Jeff Seay, John Sterling, Sue Thorson, Jim Tietz, Gary Woods. AAL = American Avenue Landfill, ph. = photographed by, WA = Wildlife Area.

If you make an interesting observation, we'd love to hear about it. We are especially interested in birds listed as casual or rare on the Fresno Audubon checklist and those found out of season or out of normal habitat. Please submit reports to Jeff Davis (246-3272, jndavis@ucsc.edu) or to the Fresno County Birders "FCB" e-mail list.

Common Redpoll - cont.

We corresponded several times by email and I sent along all of the images I had taken of the redpoll. Jeff and another Jeff [Seay] visited my place on Saturday and observed my feeder and backyard and another feeder in the front and one down the street, but they did not see the redpoll.

In the meantime, I kept close watch the rest of the day Thursday hoping to see it again, but all I saw at the feeder were goldfinches. Other birds in the immediate area at the time of the redpoll sighting were American Goldfinches, White-crowned Sparrows, Cedar Waxwings, Mourning Doves, House Finches, and Dark-eyed Juncos.

The next day, Friday, I watched the feeder like a hawk, sitting outside with my binoculars and camera, watching and waiting. Unfortunately I did not see the redpoll on Friday or since. If I see it again I will call Jeff immediately in hopes he can observe the elusive Fresno redpoll.

LOTS OF VARIETY AT MENDOTA Wednesday Walk Recap

by Frank Gibson

Margaret Houck led twenty-one Wednesday Walkers out to the Mendota Wildlife Area on a sunny March 11th. It was a great day for birds, with a couple of ultra-rarities and a first-of-year migrant. The day started off with a stop at the Producers Dairy to look for blackbirds. We found them! In addition to Brewer's, Red-wings and Tricolors, everybody got great looks at several Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds. We headed on across Whitesbridge to the Santa Fe Grade, where some Burrowing Owls were hiding while others were right out in plain sight. At the Area headquarters most of us got a good look at a lady Downy Woodpecker, which turns out not to be on the checklist for the ten San Joaquin Valley Wildlife Areas. We slowly toured the west side of the area all morning and found a nesting Great

Horned Owl; several Loggerhead Shrikes; heard a couple of Common Yellowthroats, several Marsh Wrens, a couple of VERY vocal Virginia Rails and a Sora; and saw a BUNCH of American White Pelicans. We mainly saw Tree Swallows, but we also saw a few Violet-greens, Barns and Cliffs. We stopped to scope a Great Blue Heron rookery. Twice American Bitterns flew by and some of us happened to be looking the right direction!

After lunch, as we were driving along Fresno Slough looking at the Clark's, Western and Eared Grebes, Pete Fahey spotted a Glaucous-winged Gull among a large flock of mixed gulls on the water. He and Lynn Hemink made sure that everybody got a look at this ultra-rarity that belongs up on the coast of Washington. Thanks, guys! Most of the waterfowl had been flighty all morning and didn't give us very good looks. As we were heading back to headquarters, however, we found a pond that gave us looks at quite a variety: Greater White-fronted Geese, Gadwalls, Mallards, pintails, shovelers, Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Ruddy Ducks and even Buffleheads. At the end of the day as we were tallying up we noticed a couple of Red-tailed Hawks fighting. On a second look, we realized that the one sailing off to the north was actually the first Swainson's Hawk of the season! Many, many thanks to Margaret for leading us, Lynn and Pete for all the help seeing and identifying things, and especially Steve Breuggman for allowing us to wander at will in the closed part of the Wildlife Area.

A GREAT DAY WITH ED Sun & Birds at Lost Lake

by Frank Gibson



Oh, what a beautiful day in the park we had! Lost Lake Park, that is. Ed Case met us out there on the last day of February and showed us a total of sixty-nine different birds. Wow! A Black-crowned Night-Heron looked grumpy, as usual, in the sunlight. We got lucky with Wood Ducks, as a confused pair flew up and down the river two-three times so we all could see. Other ducks, on the river, campground pond and "lake", were Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal; Mallards; shovel-

ers; Gadwall; American Wigeon; Ring-necked Ducks that actually showed us their rings; Common Goldeneyes; Buffleheads; both Hooded and Common Mergansers; and Ruddy Ducks. We don't usually see Northern Harriers there, but did that day. Also a pretty good look at a Cooper's Hawk, the usual noisy pair of Red-shouldered Hawks, Red-tails and a kestrel. The Common Moorhen was not seen on the pond, but on the river. A group of White-throated Swifts was spotted over the river. The first Cliff Swallow of the year for most folks was seen with the Tree Swallows feeding over the ponds. A skulky gnatcatcher was spotted and we saw both Cedar Waxwings and Phainopeplas. We did great on sparrows with Savannah, Song, Lincoln's, Golden- and White-crowned and juncos. Many thanks to Ed for such a great day!

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 Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and of my local chapter at the special introductory rate of only \$20.

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Please make check out to: National Audubon Society and mail to:
 Fresno Audubon Society, P.O. Box 9324, Fresno, CA 93791-9324.

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Northern Mockingbird - Gary Woods



Cedar Waxwing - Gary Woods