

Yolo County

### Dunnigan Hills, Longspur Corner

This area of beautiful rolling hills lies between Interstate 5 north of Woodland, crosses the 505 freeway (which runs from Vacaville to Esparto north of Woodland) and extends toward the Coast Range to the west. Dotted with cattle and sheep ranches as well as vineyards, field crops and hunting clubs, these hills serve as temporary home to many species of birds in the winter, particularly raptors. **Recent orchard expansion has fragmented some of the sites mentioned below.**

**Birding the site:** This entire expanse of numbered roads is a winter haven for raptors such as Golden Eagle, Northern Harrier, Ferruginous Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk (which is irruptive, i.e., common some years & nearly absent others), American Kestrel, Merlin, and Prairie Falcon. Burrowing Owls are often found east of the 505 freeway along Roads 16, 90B, 15B, and in the first half-mile of 92B north of 15B. The acres of vineyards harbor occasional Greater Roadrunners (especially along Road 16, west of the 505 freeway, and the first half-mile of 92B north of 15B). Ring-necked Pheasants are common.

Another reason to visit this area during winter is the presence of large flocks of Horned Larks which may include several of the Longspur species, particularly Chestnut-collared, with the potential for Lapland and McCown's. These large flocks may be found throughout this region, but in two areas in particular: "Longspur Corner," where Road 15B makes a jog south, and then west, and becomes Road 16; and west of the 505 freeway along Road 16. During late fall and early winter, the larks may be found foraging in the large, open expanses of low vegetation. Mountain Plovers have also been found in this area. Generally by mid-February, the vegetation has reached a height that blocks views of any small birds on the ground. Mountain Bluebirds are regularly found in the area as well, especially to the west of the 505 freeway.

In addition to the attraction of birds, several sheep ranches in this area use Kuvars to guard their sheep. These huge, beautiful white dogs were originally bred in Hungary and trained to live with and guard flocks of sheep. They may occasionally be seen along Road 92B, which can be reached by turning south from Road 13/E10, 0.9 mile west of Interstate 5. This narrow road winds along the Willow Spring Creek through the hills which are dotted with sheep (after 3.2 miles, it reaches Road 15B). There are several small marshes along Road 92B, and this is an especially good area to watch for raptors.

**Directions:** From Sacramento, take Interstate 5 north (for about 29 miles) past Woodland to the Zamora Exit (exit 548). At the top of the

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overpass, cross over the freeway and drive west on Road 13/E10. This road (which trends southwest and becomes Road 14) reaches the 505 freeway in 2.2 miles, and continues on a couple miles until it dead ends at Road 85. Heading south on the 505 frontage road (Road 90A) will lead to Road 16 in 1.9 miles. The entire area is crisscrossed by numbered roads, providing many options for wandering the area, all of which can produce interesting birds.

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