

Target Species and Rare Birds

Waterfowl: There are many excellent sites to visit from November through early April. Closest to Sacramento is the YOLO WILDLIFE AREA. Try GRAY LODGE WILDLIFE AREA for overall numbers. Tundra Swans are common at both locations in winter and throughout valley wetlands. Ross's Geese are fairly common winter visitors and may be found among Snow Geese. Greater White-fronted Geese are often abundant at COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE. Aleutian Cackling Geese are sometimes abundant at WOODBRIDGE ECOLOGICAL RESERVE.

Cinnamon Teal are present year-round, but are most numerous in late winter and early spring. Blue-winged Teal have become increasingly regular at YOLO WILDLIFE AREA and the DAVIS WETLANDS. Eurasian Wigeon are regular in low numbers at GRAY LODGE, and are rare elsewhere (look carefully through any large flock of American Wigeon). Barrow's Goldeneye are found regularly along the upper portions of the AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY. Check both Sunrise Accesses, downstream from the Nimbus Hatchery. They are also regular along Putah Creek at SOLANO LAKE and just upstream, as are Hooded Mergansers.

Wood Ducks are fairly common, but most easily viewed at REICHMUTH PARK, and several ponds in downtown Sacramento, including McKinley Park (H Street and Alhambra Boulevard), South Side Park (W Street and 8th Street), and Sutter's Fort (K Street and 28th Street).

Turkeys and Quail: Wild Turkeys have become very common, especially in the foothills, since being introduced as a game bird in the 1960s and '70s. California Quail are a common resident. Try the upper AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY and BOBELAINE. Also common in the foothills. Mountain Quail are found at COLD CANYON, RAYHOUSE ROAD, and SAND CREEK ROAD. Often heard in spring, but very hard to see.

Loons and Grebes: Common Loons are rare but regular in winter on LAKE NATOMA and FOLSOM LAKE. Other loon species should be documented. Eared Grebes are sometimes quite numerous on sewage ponds and other large bodies of water. Horned Grebes are rare away from large reservoirs, but usually present in winter on LAKE NATOMA and FOLSOM LAKE, where, at times, they can be quite numerous. Western and Clark's Grebes are regular (sometimes in large numbers) on FOLSOM LAKE and other foothills reservoirs.

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Miscellaneous Water Birds: American White Pelicans are fairly common at large wetland areas such as YOLO WILDLIFE AREA, and are often seen circling on thermals. They don't breed locally, but can be found in all seasons.

American Bitterns are found in dense marshes. Try YOLO WILDLIFE AREA, and the River Walk and Lost Slough boardwalk at COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE. Listen for them calling in spring.

Cattle Egrets breed at scattered locations and are often found in Yolo County agricultural lands, such as along Road 105 south of the DAVIS WETLANDS. They breed nearby at the EGRET-HERON ROOKERY and the UC DAVIS ARBORETUM.

White-faced Ibis have become abundant in our area over the last two decades. Try YOLO WILDLIFE AREA and other wetlands and flooded agricultural lands.

Raptors: Osprey have become more regular in the past two decades. Try SOLANO LAKE and the upper AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY. White-tailed Kites are common year-round in open areas throughout the region. Red-shouldered Hawks are common residents of riparian woodlands and residential areas with a lot of trees. Look for them along the AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY and at BOBELAINE.

Swainson's Hawks are locally common from late March through September. They are quite conspicuous in the Davis-Woodland area and south of Elk Grove. In August and September, large numbers can occur in the agricultural lands south of Davis. They regularly roost in large numbers near BABEL SLOUGH ROAD in the early fall. They are very rare in winter, but are found every year.

Ferruginous Hawks are uncommon winter visitors. Try the BREWER ROAD AREA, DUNNIGAN HILLS, ROBINSON ROAD, and SOUTHEASTERN SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRASSLANDS. Rough-legged Hawk numbers fluctuate year to year, but they are often found in the same areas. These sites are also good for Golden Eagle, Bald Eagle, and Prairie Falcon. Peregrine Falcons follow waterfowl and shorebirds, and are often seen at COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE, YOLO WILDLIFE AREA, and the DAVIS WETLANDS. Merlins are found in grasslands as well as where there are concentrations of shorebirds.

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Rails: Virginia Rails, Soras, and Common Moorhens are common but not always conspicuous in dense marshes. Try YOLO WILDLIFE AREA, DAVIS WETLANDS, and the River Walk and Lost Slough boardwalk at COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE.

Sandhill Cranes are locally common in winter at COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE and WOODBRIDGE ECOLOGICAL RESERVE.

Mountain Plovers are usually reported from BIRDS LANDING, the DUNNIGAN HILLS, and agricultural lands in Yolo County. Check for reports on the Central Valley Bird Club listserv (see RESOURCES).

Winter Shorebirds: Long-billed Curlews and Black-bellied Plovers can be found in agricultural lands, grasslands, and loafing at wastewater treatment plants (WTPs). Check the DAVIS and WOODLAND WTPs. At mudflats and shallowly flooded sites look for Least Sandpipers, Dunlin, and Long-billed Dowitchers. Check wetland edges and flooded fields for Wilson's Snipe.

Migrant Shorebirds: Excellent sites include the DAVIS WETLANDS, WOODLAND WTP, and the YOLO WILDLIFE AREA. Most numerous are Long-billed Dowitcher and Western Sandpiper (spring and fall; rare in winter). Solitary Sandpipers are rare but annual in spring and fall. Lesser Yellowlegs can often be found among the large concentrations of Greater Yellowlegs. Whimbrels are regular from mid-April through early May. Marbled Godwits are increasingly regular in Yolo County (spring and fall). In the fall, Semipalmated (July-early September), Baird's (August-September), and Pectoral Sandpipers (August-October) are annual in low numbers. Short-billed Dowitchers are found in spring and fall (often by call), and are more conspicuous as juveniles in August and September. Ruff are very rare but have been found many times at the DAVIS WETLANDS and YOLO WILDLIFE AREA. Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes can be quite common in spring and fall. Note that for shorebirds, fall begins in late June and continues into October.

Gulls: Excellent sites for large numbers of gulls in winter, including rare and uncommon species such as Mew Gull, Thayer's Gull, Western Gull, Glaucous-winged Gull, and Glaucous Gull, are the AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY and the NIMBUS HATCHERY, DAVIS WTP, and FOLSOM LAKE.

Black Terns are summer visitors to rice fields and marshes, especially in Sutter County. Check the WOODLAND WTP in the first week of May.

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Greater Roadrunners are rare and elusive residents. Recently found in the DUNNIGAN HILLS and SAND CREEK ROAD; very rare elsewhere in foothills—perhaps decreasing.

Owls: Western Screech-Owls are fairly common residents of oak woodlands, especially in the foothills. Northern Pygmy-Owls are rare but occasionally found in the Putah Creek Canyon west of Winters below the Monticello Dam. Try fishing accesses along Highway 128 and COLD CANYON. Short-eared Owl numbers vary from year to year. Try COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE, BREWER ROAD AREA, and Yolo County fields north of Road 28H and west of the DAVIS WETLANDS along Roads 103 and 104. Also try Yolo County Road 155 southeast of Davis, off of Mace Boulevard/Road 104.

Burrowing Owls are uncommon but local residents of grassland, agricultural lands, and are often found along the edge of urban areas on levees, such as in south Sacramento. The best place to look is WILDHORSE GOLF COURSE AND AGRICULTURAL BUFFER in Davis. Also try the field north of Yolo County Road 28H near Road 102, to the west of the Davis Wetlands, DUNNIGAN HILLS and NORTH NATOMAS. Development has greatly reduced overall numbers and the locations where this species may be found.

Nighthawks and Poorwills: Lesser Nighthawks are uncommon summer residents. MEISS ROAD is your best bet. Common Nighthawks have been found there in recent years. Common Poorwills are uncommon summer residents at COLD CANYON, RAYHOUSE ROAD, and BEEK'S BIGHT. During migration in September and October, they often roost on LATROBE and MICHIGAN BAR ROADS at night.

Swifts: White-throated Swifts are common but local. Good locations are Monticello Dam, Old Sacramento across from the Railroad Museum, and the Hazel Avenue bridge near the NIMBUS HATCHERY. They roost in many (if not most) of the freeway overpasses along Highway 50 in Sacramento County.

Hummingbirds: Anna's Hummingbirds are very common residents and the only hummer to expect in winter. Black-chinned Hummingbirds are common in riparian habitat near willows and residential areas in spring and summer. Transient hummingbirds are found at feeders or flowering plants. Look for Rufous, and, rarely, Allen's, Calliope, and Costa's hummingbirds. Costa's is occasional in winter.

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Woodpeckers: Lewis' Woodpeckers are uncommon winter visitors to oak woodlands; numbers vary from year to year. Try SCOTT ROAD, LATROBE ROAD, and SAND CREEK ROAD. Acorn Woodpeckers are common residents in oak woodlands, especially in the foothills. Check the upper portions of the AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY. Red-breasted Sapsuckers are uncommon but regular winter visitors in riparian areas with young trees, as well as orchards, and parks. They often prefer ornamental trees in residential areas. Nuttall's Woodpeckers are very common throughout valley woodlands, riparian areas, and oak woodlands. Downy Woodpeckers are fairly common, especially in riparian areas. Hairy Woodpeckers are absent from the valley floor and rare in the foothills. Pileated Woodpeckers are rare at SOLANO LAKE and RAYHOUSE ROAD.

Flycatchers: Olive-sided Flycatchers are rare migrants in spring and fall. Western Wood-Pewees are common in spring and summer in oak woodlands and riparian areas. Empidonax flycatchers are fairly common in migration—Pacific-slope Flycatchers are most numerous, with Willow Flycatchers being fairly common in fall. Hammond's, Gray (spring only), and Dusky Flycatchers are rare migrants. Ash-throated Flycatchers are common from spring to late summer, found in riparian areas and oak woodlands. Black Phoebe are common residents around residential areas, ponds, lakes and rivers. Say's Phoebe are fairly common in open areas in farmlands and grasslands from late September to early March.

Loggerhead Shrikes are uncommon and declining residents of open country such as agricultural lands and grasslands. Sharp recent declines are likely tied to West Nile Virus. Try BIRDS LANDING.

Vireos: Hutton's Vireos are uncommon residents of large stands of riparian woodlands in the valley, such as at COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE, and oak woodlands in the foothills, such as at BEEK'S BIGHT. Cassin's and Warbling Vireos are regular in spring and fall migration.

Corvids: Yellow-billed Magpies were abundant in farmlands and residential areas around the Sacramento Valley. Numbers have dropped in recent years because of West Nile Virus, but may be rebounding. Common Ravens are becoming more regular in the region—especially in the foothills on either side of the valley.

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Swallows: See section the on PURPLE MARTINS in the City of Sacramento chapter. Tree Swallows are common to abundant in the valley and foothills and the only regular swallow in winter. The similar Violet-green Swallow is fairly common in the foothills, but usually rare on the valley floor. Bank Swallows are rare breeders (ROSSMOR BAR, BOBELAINE) and uncommon migrants (DAVIS WETLANDS).

Titmouse and Nuthatches: Oak Titmouse is a fairly common year-round resident in riparian habitat and oak woodlands. White-breasted Nuthatches are common in oak woodlands. Red-breasted Nuthatches are rare, but may be found from fall through spring—especially in residential areas with conifers and sites such as the UC Davis campus (DAVIS CITY LIMITS) and EAST LAWN CEMETERY.

Wrens: Canyon Wrens are uncommon residents best found near Monticello Dam (COLD CANYON), and occasionally at BEEK'S BIGHT. Rock Wrens are easiest to find in rocky outcrops at FOLSOM LAKE and also at Monticello Dam and rocky grasslands in the low foothills. Bewick's Wrens are common residents in foothill woodlands and valley riparian forests. House Wrens are very common breeders in valley riparian forests—less common in winter. Winter Wrens are rare winter visitors to riparian forests with dense undergrowth (REICHMUTH PARK, COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE). Wrens are often detected by their vocalizations.

American Dippers are rare in winter. Uncommon and sporadic on Putah Creek below Monticello Dam and the Highway 128 bridge (COLD CANYON).

Kinglets and Gnatcatchers: Golden-crowned Kinglets are regular winter visitors to dense riparian forest and occasionally residential areas. Try COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE, SOLANO LAKE, REICHMUTH PARK, WILLIAM LAND PARK and EAST LAWN CEMETERY. Much easier to hear high call than to see. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers are fairly common in spring and summer in foothill chaparral, such as RAYHOUSE ROAD. Transient at COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE and uncommon in winter on the upper AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY.

Bluebirds: Western Bluebirds are common residents in grasslands and oak woodlands. Easy to find around Folsom Lake. Mountain Bluebirds are uncommon winter visitors to open sites such as SOUTHEASTERN SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRASSLANDS and the DUNNIGAN HILLS.

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Varied Thrush numbers vary from year to year in riparian and, occasionally, residential areas in winter. Try COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE, REICHMUTH PARK, and SOLANO LAKE.

Wrentits are common residents in chaparral on both sides of the valley such as at COLD CANYON and in dense riparian understory such as at COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE. Listen for characteristic call.

California Thrashers are fairly common residents in foothill chaparral. Best found at RAYHOUSE ROAD and SAND CREEK ROAD.

Phainopeplas are residents, but most commonly found in winter in foothill chaparral and oak woodland, and riparian habitat. Found near mistletoe and fruiting plants. Try SOLANO LAKE, UPPER SUNRISE, LAKE NATOMA, and around Folsom Lake.

Warblers and Tanagers: In spring and fall they pass through the area in large numbers. Productive sites include REICHMUTH PARK, COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE, and BABEL SLOUGH. Nashville (more common in spring), Yellow, Black-throated Gray, Townsend's, Hermit (uncommon), MacGillivray's (more common in fall), and Wilson's Warblers are regular. Orange-crowned Warblers are found year-round (rare in summer), with a large influx in migration. Yellow-breasted Chats are rare but regular in migration and breed in foothill streams. See AUBURN STATE RECREATION AREA and COLOMA. Western Tanagers are regular in migration and rare in winter.

Sparrows: California Towhees are locally common, found in chaparral and oak woodlands in the foothills. Also try the upper AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY. Uncommon on valley floor. Rufous-crowned Sparrows are year-round residents and easiest to find in rocky outcrops at Folsom Lake, such as BEEK'S BIGHT. Also try LATROBE ROAD, LAKE NATOMA, and RAYHOUSE ROAD. Vesper Sparrows are rare winter visitors to open grasslands. Lark Sparrows are common in oak woodlands in the foothills. Sage Sparrows are residents in chaparral on both sides of the valley—most easily found in spring when singing. Try RAYHOUSE ROAD and SAND CREEK ROAD. Grasshopper Sparrows are rare breeders in foothill grasslands. Try MEISS ROAD. Large flocks of White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows are found from late September through April. White-throated Sparrows are rare, but several are found with the crowned sparrows each season. In the low floodplain, such as COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE, Song Sparrows are the only common sparrow from May through August. Lincoln's and Fox Sparrows

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are fairly common from fall through spring (Sooty Fox Sparrows are most common; Slate-colored and Red Fox Sparrows are rare).

Grosbeaks and Buntings: Black-headed Grosbeaks are migrants and local breeders in riparian forests and in the foothills. Blue Grosbeaks are regular breeders in the low floodplain with dense vegetation such as annual sunflower. Try COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE, DAVIS WETLANDS, and YOLO WILDLIFE AREA. Lazuli Buntings are fairly common in spring in oak woodlands and chaparral. Try RAYHOUSE ROAD and COLOMA. Regular migrant (more common in fall) and uncommon breeder in valley sites such as the YOLO WILDLIFE AREA and COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE.

Blackbirds: Tricolored Blackbirds are sporadic breeders in the region and fairly common in winter near dairies east of COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE. Also try BREWER ROAD AREA. This species has declined greatly from loss of wetlands. Yellow-headed Blackbirds can be found in spring and summer at MATHER LAKE, YOLO WILDLIFE AREA, and the DAVIS WETLANDS. Rare in winter.

Great-tailed Grackles are becoming increasingly common since they first showed up in the region in the mid-'90s. There are large but somewhat isolated populations in Folsom (shopping center near East Bidwell and Highway 50), MATHER LAKE, Natomas, Elk Grove, and West Sacramento.

Orioles: Hooded Orioles are uncommon spring and summer residents, nesting in palm trees in town and on the outskirts of Sacramento and Davis. They are rare in winter, sometimes reported visiting hummingbird feeders. In fall they can be sometimes found in REICHMUTH PARK. Bullock's Orioles are common breeders in riparian forests, oak savannah, and oak woodlands.

Lawrence's Goldfinches are rare, local, and sporadic breeders in the foothills. Try LATROBE AND MICHIGAN BAR ROADS, RAYHOUSE ROAD, and SAND CREEK ROAD. Rare and more unpredictable in winter.

The above list is updated from the previous three editions. Thanks to Ed Greaves for his review of the previous edition's list.



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Finding and Reporting Rare Birds

One of the exciting aspects of birding is finding rare birds. The best way to do that is to get out in the field as often as you can and to learn the status, distribution, field marks, and calls of the regular species. Because birds fly, no visit to a familiar site is quite the same, and just about anything can turn up.

Certain patterns have been recognized over time, and some birds are far rarer than others. For example, some eastern songbirds, such as Blackpoll Warblers and American Redstarts, show up in fair numbers each year at coastal sites like Point Reyes, and they are not completely unexpected for the Sacramento area. Indigo Buntings, as another example, have nested several times in the Sacramento area. Others, like Blackburnian Warblers and Bay-breasted Warblers, account for only a few records each for the Sacramento area, despite decades of observations. Some species that were long considered very rare, like Semipalmated Sandpipers, are now known to occur annually in low numbers (there may be a combination of factors at work, including people knowing what to look for and making a concerted effort to find them, improved habitat and birder access to locations such as the DAVIS WETLANDS, and a greater number of birders with high quality spotting scopes).

Rare birds can turn up at any time, but knowing when to look can improve your odds. Many rare songbirds have been found in late May and June, when the bulk of the common Western migrants already have passed. September and October are also very productive. Occasionally, rare species spend the winter in our area. With many eyes and ears in the field during the Christmas Bird Counts, rarities are found each year. Shorebirding is often most productive in July through October, while unusual gulls and waterfowl are typically found in winter.

Documentation: Once an unusual species is found, careful observation of the bird's field marks, calls, and behavior is key to documenting it. Note the relative shape and size of the bird compared to common species. Write down as much detail as possible regarding bill shape, the facial pattern, relative proportions and length of wings and tail, coloration of bare parts as well as feather patterns. Vocalizations can be extremely helpful. Rule out common species and hybrids. For example, if you find a suspected Red-naped Sapsucker, make sure it does not show characteristics of hybridization with a Red-breasted Sapsucker.

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Experience will tell you that these hybrids are more common than pure Red-naped Sapsuckers in the Sacramento area.

A good description of a rare bird explains why it is not one of the more common species or another rarity with a similar appearance. Much of documenting a rarity is ruling out other possibilities. Photographs can be very helpful. Many birders never go out without a camera. A small digital camera used with a spotting scope can provide definitive documentation of a rare species. The video features on digital cameras are improving rapidly and can record songs and calls. But photography can also distract you from careful observation of a bird that you may only have in view for a few minutes (or seconds). It is better to have a tentative identification than to jump to conclusions. Report the bird so others may see it. The most active rare bird reporting site for the Sacramento area is the Central Valley Bird Club listserv; see RESOURCES.

Well-documented birds become part of the scientific record, and are published quarterly in *North American Birds*. The understanding of status and distribution of rare birds as well as common species has largely been the work of committed amateurs.

In addition to reporting your finds to listservs and rare bird alerts (see RESOURCES), please submit reports of rare and uncommon species, species found out of season, and rare or previously undocumented nesting species to the appropriate North American Birds county editor. For the Sacramento Area:

Amador, Tim Steurer (tsteurer@hotmail.com);
Calaveras, John Sterling (ani@cal.net);
Colusa, Sutter, Yuba, Bruce Deuel (bdeuel@dfg.ca.gov);
Placer, Ed Pandolfino (erpfromca@aol.com);
Sacramento, Chris Conard (conardc@gmail.com);
San Joaquin, Frances Oliver (hummer52@sbcglobal.net);
Solano, Robin Leong (robin_leong@netzero.net);
Yolo, John Sterling (jsterling@wavecable.com).

A *Checklist to the Birds of the Sacramento Area* is available through the Sacramento Audubon Society.

