

SEASONAL OBSERVATIONS

Function Statement

October 2012

SCOPE

A monthly summary of the avian highlights (except April-May and June-July are combined), consisting, at this time, primarily of reports from the Central Valley Birds listserv and, to a lesser extent, the Sacramento Birds listserv. Additional reports are found by searching monthly bar graphs on eBird ("Explore Data"), checking other regional listservs, such as Calbirds and County Birders, and following up on reports from CBC compilers and others sources as they come up. Only occasionally are reports sent directly to the Seasonal Observations columnist. On some occasions when the validity of the report is not clear, polite followup questions are sent to the observers reporting their findings.

By longstanding tradition, the column covers the Sacramento Area, roughly defined as lying between Hwy 20 to the north, Hwy 12 to the south, and the 1000' contour to the east and west, plus all of Sacramento and Yolo Counties. Remarkable reports just outside these limits or which add context to a theme are sometimes included.

Following the basic format that has appeared in the Observer for decades, reports are compiled in a narrative form, with a theme of the monthly highlights based on apparent trends in the reports, such as good numbers of rare shorebird reports or comments on an early arrival of common migrants. This is followed by a listing of the reports in a more or less taxonomic sequence, with some bending of the sequence to allow for a flow in the narrative, such as when two interesting birds are reported from the same location. Over the years and depending on the author, the column has varied slightly between a direct listing of the observations and a more lyrical narrative (it is a fine balance to strike in the limited space of the Observer). The column is sent to the Newsletter editor and to the Webmaster by e-mail, along with one or more photos of highlights solicited from observers who posted photos on-line or mentioned that they had taken them. Finally, a list of the observers who reported the birds mentioned in the column is included at the end of the column, along with those who provided context or additional information.

Depending on the number of reports for a month/period (April-May is typically the heaviest), sifting through the reports and writing the column takes 4-7 hours. When followup is required, a few days of lead-time should be figured into the process.