

## **Plumas Birds e-mail list postings August through December 2008**

**August 4, 2008**

Jim Battagin reported that Mary Lou found a juvenile green heron this morning near the courthouse in Quincy. This may be the young of the bird(s) Colin has reported by the high school and the bike path. Jim and Paul are trying to locate the adults so the juvenile can be released near them. Any updates Paul? Maybe help is needed in locating the adults?

On another note, Darrel, Darla, and I hiked the Bucks Summit loop last Tuesday, which starts near Bucks Summit and goes down towards Bucks Lake and back along the other side of Bucks Creek. It's a really nice trail and there were lots of wildflowers. The birding was excellent with numerous warblers including Nashville, yellow, orange-crowned, and yellow-rumped as well as several Lazuli buntings. A Cooper's hawk was scouting the bird action as well. We also saw a juvenile chipping sparrow, which looked a lot like a Brewer's sparrow!

Also, I have archived the January through July postings on the Plumas Audubon web page:

[http://www.aviancenter.com/Plumas\\_Audubon.htm](http://www.aviancenter.com/Plumas_Audubon.htm)

Thanks to everyone for posting your bird sightings to the list, it's been very exciting. The six-month Jan through July archive is 22 pages long with over 50 postings!

Happy birding,

David Arsenault

**August 12, 2008**

A couple birds not normally in American Valley during the breeding season are showing up. I saw red-shouldered hawk, american kestrel and marsh wren in areas along Quincy Junction Rd this morning. Birds are on the move!

Colin Dillingham

**August 12, 2008**

I had a juvenile Golden Eagle fly over the house yesterday. Came from the east and was heading west. Only the 2nd GOEA I have seen in the Almanor Basin the last one was on the X-mas bird count last December. It prompted me to update my yard list for the year which now stands after 3 years at 126 species. I added a Black-crowned Night Heron last

week. I think they are breeding around the lake as I have now seen them in small numbers from spring through fall here.

Ryan Burnett

**August 18, 2008**

I know these species are old news after all the recent postings, but two were Plumas County birds for me and Gregorio Saucedo: two juvenile White-tailed Kites in Humbug Valley last Thursday and a Green Heron along Spanish Creek last Friday. I've been looking for a Green Heron in American Valley all summer so that was a really nice sighting. It even kept flushing time after time as we were walking downstream. We also saw a Red-shouldered Hawk in Humbug as well as along Spanish Creek near the sewage ponds. All of the kites and hawks were juveniles.

David Arsenault

**August 18, 2008**

I walked along the NW shore of Lake Almanor near where I saw the western grebes nesting a couple weeks ago. It appears that the Lake level has come up and there were well over 100 grebe eggs (in just a few hundred feet) that apparently had floated to shore and were eaten by scavengers. A few had just broken on the rocky shore and the contents had leaked out.

Colin Dillingham

**August 19, 2008**

Colin et al., I just got back from taking Diana Humple, PRBO biologist studying western grebes for here masters, on a tour of the lakeshore and noticed the main colony that I counted over 300 nests in 3 weeks ago has only about 80 or 90 nests with Grebes incubating. A number of the birds on nests and some swimming in the colony had bulging backs which means they are packing recently fledged chicks. Based on chronology of their incubation most of those nests should be hatching now. So many of the nests that are now grebeless may have fledged young already. The water level is rapidly dropping right now as it does every August right in the middle of the grebe nesting season. I counted 80+ nests that are now on dry ground and that were likely abandoned. I also observed California gulls coursing over the colony and one successfully stole an egg from a brooding bird that was flushed off when a bald eagle flew over the colony and flushed all the coots and ducks sitting around therein. My guess is that most of those eggs you saw were from the nests abandoned near shore or some that may have been washed out of the windward side of the colony with the high winds we had yesterday. And maybe a few were from Gulls poaching. A major issue for the Almanor Western Grebes (2nd or 3rd largest colony in the state) is the dropping water levels in August. If the water level was held steady until the end of August the problem

would be significantly ameliorated. I did notice this weekend another 75 or so nests up near the North Shore Campground were being built so some of those that abandoned may have moved to the new location (it is in 6 feet of water) and are trying again. I can't remember ever seeing as many Western Grebes on the lake as I did today. Over 1000 birds. Diana Humple who is studying western grebe genetics on NE California lakes for here masters will be up in September catching grebes for her study and we should get a pretty good idea of how many young were produced. Even with the failure there are still likely to be 200 - 500 young grebes produced on Almanor this year, but with steady water levels that number could be double.

Ryan Burnett

### **August 19, 2008**

I don't think I correctly interpreted the "change" in lake level yesterday. I was at a different spot along the lake shore yesterday, than I was a couple weeks ago. I retract what I emailed yesterday about the lake level rising. I also don't think the nesting failure was as extreme as I thought yesterday. I only saw about 8 - 10 broken eggs along the shore in the northern part of this colony today.

When I returned today to the same site I was at a couple weeks ago (Feather River bypass channel at confluence with Lake Almanor), there didn't appear to be much change in the lake level, except perhaps a few inches shallower, and the lake level certainly did not come up. When I looked at the nests today with binoculars (yesterday I was without binoculars) I could see that many of the nests were still active. I agree with Ryan that the eggs on shore could easily have been washed out of the nests by wave action (likely from wind as Ryan suggests, but also possibly by boat wakes?)

Ryan and I have been looking at different colonies today. Ryan was looking at the colony closer to the mouth of the North Fork Feather River accessed from Chester. I have been looking at the colony along Hwy 89, about 1 mile south of Hwy 36. My descriptions are regarding this colony which starts at the Feather River bypass and goes south to Almanor West.

I needed a spotting scope to get a relatively accurate nest count, so I didn't try. If I was pressured to guess, I would estimate between 500 and 1000 grebes in the Almanor West colony, with perhaps 300 - 500 nests. Although some of the nests furthest out from shore didn't have grebes, most of the nests closest to shore had grebes with eggs on them. That would indicate that wave action may have caused the abandonment of nests that were closest to open water.

This is a phenomenal colony and I have only witnessed this once before in Plumas County. I highly recommend that folks get out and enjoy the grebes.

Keep your distance so that you don't cause any nest abandonment! If you do get out, try to get as accurate a count as you can and keep good notes on what part of the lake you counted your grebes.

Colin Dillingham

**August 20, 2008**

So PG&E's operation of Almanor water levels is resulting in an annual take of migratory birds...hm, isn't there a law against that? Oh, yeah: the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It's the same wildlife law that causes CalTrans to time bridge work so as not to interfere with swallow nesting. Because you have documented the situation so well, maybe someone should talk with PG&E about lake level manipulations.

Linda Blum

**August 20, 2008**

This morning I had what appears to be an immature male Costa's hummingbird coming to my feeders, 400 First Street, in East Quincy, Plumas County. The bird is best observed from the upstairs bedroom, but you can also see the feeders from the back yard.

Call my house and make an appointment with my son Henry if you are interested in trying to see the bird today (283-1133). I'll be up looking at the birds tomorrow morning about 5:45 AM, so feel free to make an appointment for early AM before I head to work tomorrow as well. Also saw 1 calliope, about 10 anna's and 50 rufous hummingbirds at the feeders this morning (up to 25 simultaneously at dawn).

I have several other photos as well, but don't want to overload those with dial up servers. Reply if you want additional photos. The bird in the lower left is an immature rufous hummingbird, and is coming to a feeder in the background, so is a bit further away. This bird was essentially identical in size to the rufous hummingbirds coming in to the feeders, and noticeably smaller than the anna's.

Why I think this is a Costa's –

The few gorget feathers starting to come in are distinctly purple (admittedly, feather color doesn't show up well in these photos, but better in the "gorget" photo) and there aren't any rufous colored feathers. That pretty much rules out everything except black-chinned, Costa's and Lucifer.

The bill is short and straight, just a little shorter than the head length.

A black-chinned hummer would have a bill longer than the head and a Lucifer would have a decurved bill.

Also good for Costa's - the pale supercilium completely outlines the dark auriculars. This is a good character for female Costa's versus female black-chinned, and I think it holds up for males, but I'm not certain on this ID character.

The body is washed with a grayish color - black-chins in my experience don't show a grayish wash to the extent shown in this bird.

I'd love to hear back from anybody that has comments on the identification.

Fix - could you forward to Tietz and see if he has any comments on the ID. I seem to have lost his email address. Thanks,

Colin Dillingham



**November 14, 2008**

Hi

Birders,

I cruised around American and Thompson Valleys yesterday for a quick afternoon raptor fix and definitely got my fill. I saw 8 species along Chandler, Quincy Junction, and La Porte Roads and the sewage ponds:

Red-shouldered Hawk (2),  
Ferruginous Hawk (3),  
Rough-legged Hawk (4),  
Red-tailed Hawk (10),  
Prairie Falcon (1),  
Northern Harrier (1),  
Barn Owl (1),  
Golden Eagle (1).

Two of the Red-tails in Thompson Valley were dark morphs.

Bob Battagin was also prowling the valley and he saw American Kestrel as well.

Sierra Valley is probably the best place in Plumas Co. to see a large number and diversity of raptors. Colin Dillingham has scheduled the Sierra Valley CBC for Wed. Dec. 17. Contact Colin if you are interested in participating ([cdillingham@fs.fed.us](mailto:cdillingham@fs.fed.us), 283-1133).

In Chester, Ryan Burnett has seen some great birds lately: "there was a lost and very late young American Redstart in my yard Monday, Northern Shrike out at the mouth of the river, and at least 1 Rough-legged Hawk on the meadow with the usual Red-shouldered and tailed around as well."

Best,

David Arsenault

**November 24, 2008**

Hi All, The Almanor Christmas Bird Count will be held on Sunday December 14 this year. We will meet at the Holiday parking lot in Chester at 0800 and finish with an optional no-host tally dinner at the Knotbumper (across the street from Holiday market) at 5pm. Birders of all levels are encouraged to participate. There is a requested 5 dollar donation to the National Audubon Society from all participants. Hope to see many of you on December 14<sup>th</sup>.

Ryan Burnett

**December 1, 2008**

Greetings Birders!

I would like to invite you to participate in the first annual (unofficial) American Valley Christmas Bird Count! Thanks to the efforts of the ineffable Darrel Jury, we will be counting birds in a Count Circle centered in Quincy on Saturday, December 20<sup>th</sup>. Meet at the Quincy Post Office at 8am with your binoculars ready. Because the idea emerged after Audubon's deadline for submitting a new count application, this year will be a warm-up where we can work out any glitches. We'll apply to be official next year.

Don't neglect our other local counts; there are so many important places to bird around here!

We can meet afterwards (4pm?) at the Alley Cat / Wine Bar for a cup of hot tea or a cold beer if anyone is interested. Spread the word!

For the birds,

Darla DeRuiter

**December 5, 2008**

For those of you interested, the Sierra Valley Christmas Bird Count will be Wednesday, December 17.

Please let me know if you plan to attend, so I can get a good head count and determine how to divide up the count circle.

We will be meeting at 6:00 AM for breakfast at Dee's Station Cafe (in Portola, cross Feather River on Gulling St to get to old town). The restaurant is at 270 Commercial St.

My home phone is 530-283-1133.

As always, there is a \$5 participation donation to cover Audubon Society's expenses.

Colin Dillingham