

2/21/07

Hi Plumas Birders,

I spent Monday and Tuesday birding in American Valley and vicinity.

On Monday I walked along Chandler Road from Highway 70 to Quincy Junction Road. I'm sure those of you who live along this stretch are aware of your relatively high density of Acorn Woodpeckers, but this walk gave me a chance to appreciate them. I was pleasantly surprised to find the juv. NORTHERN SHRIKE still hanging out (in the large fruit tree behind the green swing set looking metal apparatus that has bird feeders hanging from it) at 2312 Chandler Road. Since the bird was found there in December, the house has had a serious fire and appears to be unoccupied now.

There were eight HOODED MERGANSERS at the Thompson Valley Ranch stock pond.

Birding various feeders in town I happened on all three species of our Carpodacus finches....Purple, Cassin's and House. Probably not many birders in California can walk through town and have that experience.

Also on Monday I found five SANDHILL CRANES, two in Thompson Valley and three in American Valley near where Chandler Road parallels Spanish Creek (thanks to Scott Edwards for mentioning those three birds to me). At this later location there was a GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE hanging out with the Canada Geese. There were four ROSS'S GEESE in the open field east of Gansner Airport.

On Tuesday I spent a good part of the day at the QCSO sewer ponds servicing the Wood Duck nest boxes there. There was a single female BARROW'S GOLDENEYE in the large pond and seven WOOD DUCKS either in the pond or snoozing on the shore.

Good birding,
Bob Battagin

3/26/07

Greetings All,

I received a phone call this morning from Yvonne Bales regarding the deaths of a number of white-crowned sparrows in her yard. Within a couple of days' cycle, she and her husband have observed 3-4 sparrows puffing up, moving really slowly, eating like crazy at their feeders, and then, according to her husband, dying (they have not recovered a corpse yet). She says the same kind of mortality has happened at their house for the last couple years, although she wasn't absolutely sure last years' deaths were all white-crowned sparrows. The Bales' live in East Quincy off Bell Lane.

Does anyone have any ideas on what's going on here?

Thanks for any input,

Darla DeRuiter

3/26/07

ounds like Salmonella, a common disease transferred from infected bird feces. The solution is to stop feeding birds at infected locations for a month or so. Alternatively, clean all feeders with bleach daily and clean up feces under feeders. If seed/feces drops into soil, this is very difficult to do successfully, and best solution is to stop feeding birds to prevent further infection.

This disease is most common with pine siskins, but is also transmittable to other species.

Colin Dillingham

3/26/07

To clarify a few things:

Last year the local paper had an article regarding a disease that was affecting birds in our area. Don't recall what the disease was, but if we recall right, it was our Purple Finches that had it. Same symptoms as we are seeing now in the Sparrows. As happened last year, it only seems to be affecting the one species (Finches last year, Sparrows this year). We feed the birds year 'round and know their cycles around here pretty well. We have had three couples this spring, and are down to just one bird now. My husband has observed them through the quick-moving cycle of swelling up, moving slow, and feeding voraciously. They seem to lose their ability to fly near the end (flight distances can be measured in feet). Then they are gone. Darla asked me if they could just be moving on, but it has not been our experience for them to pass through so quickly. When the Finches had the disease last year, we found several dead birds following the symptoms. Though we have found none yet this year, I would not be surprised if they died nearby. We have a pond within a block of the house (maybe 25 to 50 yards away) and it is probably their water source. Don't know if this has anything to do with what is going on.

Any thoughts would be appreciated.

Yvonne

3/27/07

I suspect Colin D. is correct re: salmonella at the feeding site. Ceasing feeding and thorough disinfection of the feeders - and changing to a new spot in the yard to resume feeding in a few weeks, to avoid recontamination from the ground under the old feeder site, should prevent infecting additional birds.

Linda Blum