

## **Plumas Birds Archive**

**September 17 to November 4**

**September 17**

We just re-found the juvenile **BLACK-THROATED SPARROW** that was spotted yesterday by Terry & Jerry Williams (big thanks!). It is working both sides of Quincy Junction Road between Clear Creek and New England Ranch, flying back and forth from thistles to the ditch alongside the road, frequently perching on the fence providing really good views. Amber & Scott Edwards

photo from Jerry & Terry Williams



**September 19**

A flock of approximately 20 **CEDAR WAXWINGS** were around the Gansner Park foot/bike bridge over Spanish Creek today, they were busy catching insects despite the abundance of choke-cherries. At the sewage ponds there were 2 **COMMON YELLOWTHROATS** in the bushes at the back of the big pond, the same area where they were found on David's trip last Spring, we watched one catch a bright blue damselfly. Also in this spot was a **LINCOLN'S** and a **WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW**. We looked

again for the Black-throated Sparrow across from Hansen's pond but it seems to have moved on. Amber & Scott Edwards

## **September 20**

Yesterday evening we went up to Lookout Rock (an awesome spot, email us if you want directions) along the trail we found a flock of Mountain Chickadees and 1 TOWNSEND'S WARBLER (YEA!). On the dirt road nearby we came across a group of at least 4 SOOTY GROUSE working the roadside and making amazing little communication calls to each other. Amber & Scott Edwards

Sunday morning out in a kayak on Lake Almanor ½ a mile south of the Feather River delta an American Bittern flushed up out of the meadow and flew NE towards the river mouth. It is the first bittern I have seen on the lake. There were also a number of Common Loons (as we observed on the grebe survey a week or so ago) - there seem to be an unusual number of Common Loons on the lake right now with most in alternate plumage. I also saw five species of grebe from kayak as well: Western, Clark's, Eared, Horned and Pied-billed. Ryan Burnett

## **September 23**

### **Plumas Audubon Society**

#### **Late September Grebe Update**

The days are getting cooler and the nights are getting longer, nevertheless, we still have over 200 grebes setting on nests at Lake Almanor and Eagle Lake. A majority of the *Aechmophorus* grebes on these lakes have hatched their young and are out on the lakes foraging and growing. On September 7<sup>th</sup> we performed our first brood survey on Lake Almanor and were pleased by the results. We estimate that there were approximately **2,200** adult grebes (91% Western and 9% Clarks) and **550** young on the lake at that time. Those numbers look a lot better than last year when we had approximately **2,900** adults and **67** young. Last year was pretty bad in terms of reproduction numbers and this year's data was encouraging for us. PG&E held the water in Lake Almanor later and then released it at a slower rate and we feel that this contributed to the nesting success on that lake.

On Eagle Lake the numbers were better yet. During our first brood survey on September 16<sup>th</sup> we estimated that there were **4,100** adult grebes (82% Western, 18% Clark's) and **1,320** young on the lake. These numbers are much higher than we had during last year's survey; then we estimated a total of **1,700** adults and **134** young. The lake level on Eagle Lake was a bit higher this year and that corresponds to more available nesting habitat for the birds. These numbers illustrate the significance that lake levels have on reproductive success for these birds. Eagle Lake has been called the most significant lake in the Intermountain West for breeding grebes and these numbers support that claim. Efforts are being made to increase lake levels on Eagle Lake and we will be interested in how

those will affect grebe population numbers in the future. For now we are excited by the reproduction successes on these two lakes.

We have two more brood surveys scheduled (September 30<sup>th</sup> for Almanor and October 5<sup>th</sup> for Eagle) and those will provide us a more detailed look at this nesting season. I will be monitoring the remaining nesting birds for the next few weeks and then that will be the end of this season's monitoring. We will keep you posted on our results.

Nils Lunder

## **September 27**

For those of you interested - I've attached the results of our PRBO Conservation Science Bird-a-thon results from our Big Day in Glenn County on Sunday. Several of you sponsored our team - which included Tim Rodenkirk from Coos Bay, Oregon; Dennis Vroman from Grants Pass, Oregon; Bruce Deuel from Red Bluff; and myself. Bob Battagin was there in spirit, but had banged up his knee on Saturday so was unable to participate.

We started at 2:26 AM at the Blue Gum Motel parking lot in the Central Valley of California when fellow birder Tim Rodenkirk woke us up to listen to the Great Horned Owl calling in our motel parking lot. We had heard barn owls at the Motel the evening before, but they were silent as we waited for Bruce to arrive for our planned 3 AM start time. Bruce arrived on time and the Great Horned was still calling. We drove up west into the Mendocino National Forest through oak savannah habitat (screech owl and barn owl) and arrived at a high elevation site in old growth forest (Plaskett Meadows) where we heard a spotted owl in the light rain.

We birded our way down through the conifer forest (mountain quail, brown creeper, Townsend's warbler and solitaires were cooperative), into the chaparral (Wrentit and California thrasher), down into the grasslands (Meadowlark), then Oak Savannah (Lark Sparrow). The roadrunner we found scouting on Saturday didn't cooperate again on our big day. We enjoyed the little town of Elk Creek where we found a good diversity of songbirds including bushtit and yellow warbler. We headed up to Stony Gorge Reservoir and birded at Fig Point, where the fig trees and the abundant ripe fruit pulled me away from scoping the lake for a few minutes (delicious!).

We drove down to Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge and had a wonderful couple of hours on the Auto Tour Route and trail around the Headquarters (Peregrine Falcon, thousands of ducks, Tule Greater White-fronted Goose, shorebirds). After that we headed north through the town of Willows and back to our Blue Gum motel where our stakeout wild turkey and northern mockingbird cooperated. We headed west through agricultural fields (58 Swainson's Hawks!) to the Sacramento River, where Tree Swallows and Cedar

Waxwings were our last species of the day. Our total was 123 species, and we all were happy. A quick swim in the motel pool after dark with barn owls and great blue herons flying overhead was a nice way to end the day.

Colin Dillingham

### **October 10**

Scott and Amber Edwards and I had a nice day birding Sierra Valley today. Highlights were 23 ferruginous hawks, including 19 in Sierra County on A-24 between Loyalton and the Plumas County Line. 3 of them were dark phase ferruginous hawks. We also found 125 red-tailed hawks and a total of 60 species. Colin Dillingham

### **October 24**

Today we birded around Quincy, some spots were quite birdy with large mixed flocks. Along Chandler Rd just upstream from the bridge a group of Mt Chickadees, Juncos, Kinglets and Goldfinches were mobbing a NORTHERN PYGMY OWL. At the sewage ponds we were happy to find a HUTTON'S VIREO with a large mixed flock past the first pond in the willows along Spanish Creek, also nearby there were 40 CEDAR WAXWINGS. In the middle pond there were 4 WHITE FRONTED GEESE. In the afternoon while walking our dog behind our house we were very surprised to find a PACIFIC WREN working a pile of trimmed branches, yea! a new yard bird.

Amber & Scott Edwards

### **November 1**

At 11:30 am I spotted a Flicker with yellow shafts in the oak tree outside our window, I grabbed my binos for a closer look and noted that it had a red moustachial stripe, gray face and reddish tan on the top of the head running down the nape. It then flew to a nearby pine giving me a great view of the yellow underwings, I watched it for a few seconds until it flew around to the front of our house. I checked a guide and realized it had to be a GILDED FLICKER! When Scott got home at noon we looked all around our hill and Scott finally saw the bird fly through the trees on the side of the hill. There are a lot of birds here today, Bushtits, Robins, Cedar Waxwings, even a Townsend's Solitaire, maybe it got drawn in by all the activity! Let me know if you want to come search for it, I'll post if we see it again. Amber & Scott Edwards

### **November 2**

Hi Amber, I don't want to squash your excitement or even try to say that without seeing this bird that it is not a Gilded Flicker but...I am not sure it is possible to separate a Gilded from some redxyellow intergrades reliably. At least it is not as easy as it might appear in Sibley. I see a few intergrades every year in the winter around here presumably over wintering from the extensive intergrade zone to our north and east. I have seen some presumed intergrades that don't quite fit a blending of the two lineages as well and the pattern of brown and grey on the heads of flickers often seem to fit

somewhere between what Sibley and Nat Geo illustrate and probably has to do somewhat with intergrading, feather wear/quality, and diet during molting.

Another reason to be cautious about calling it a Gilded is the likelihood of a gilded occurring in Northern California would be small as they are permanent residents in their small range of sonoran desert habitat and haven't ever shown a pattern of vagrancy. Check out these pictures of intergrades in Reno and Oregon respectively. They both show extensive brown onto the back of the head.

If you get another look study the striping on the back they should be narrower and the brown color should be more muted but unless you see them side by side I think this would be hard to distinguish (the spotting on the flanks of northern is also supposed to approach barring in gilded). I think in reality with the range of variation in many generations of intergrading that it is very difficult to tell the two apart. Would love to see a picture if you happen to capture one. Thanks for sharing, Ryan Burnett



Ryan,  
What about the yellow underwing? Would that be explained away by a hybrid?  
Michelle Fulton

Yes intergrades can have either red or yellow underwings (red is more common at least in birds you see in California) or even a salmonish orange color that appears to be a mix of both. Ryan Burnett

Yes, lots of hybrids have yellow underwings. John Sterling

Another thing I've looked for in hybrid flickers, is the presence of some hint of the red nape bar of a yellow-shafted flicker. I think the red nape bar is a diagnostic mark for yellow-shafted flicker. If you see both a red moustachial stripe and a hint of the red nape bar, you can be relatively certain you are looking at a hybrid male red-shafted/yellow shafted flicker (well, as sure as you can be in the natural world!). Check out the two

attached photos Ryan sent - you'll see that red bar of a yellow-shafted flicker hidden on the nape. Colin Dillingham

#### **November 4**

Hello all, driving around the north side of Indian Valley yesterday I spotted a Pileated Woodpecker foraging in a small oak tree. That was a first for me in this valley, a magnificent specimen. Nils Lunder

Wow! We had them where I grew up in SE Texas. I would love to see one up here!  
Scott Pruter

While shoveling snow this afternoon I saw a shadow go over, I looked up and saw this hawk. He circled long enough for me to grab the camera and get several shots before he was too high and out of range. Rob Adams



