

# Central Valley Bird Highlights: August through November 2024

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A shocking first Central Valley **Wood Sandpiper** spent two days at the Woodland WTP in Yolo County 9–10 September (JG). This Eurasian shorebird of the genus *Tringa* was seen and photographed by dozens of observers and moved between the main WTP and a tiny drainage pond behind a storage facility where birders were graciously given access to view the bird. This sandpiper, a juvenile, was accepted by the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) as the fifth record for California.



Wood Sandpiper Photo by Josh Greenfield.

A **White-winged Scoter** at the Sacramento NWR in Glenn County 4–17 November was the first county record for this sea duck (JS). It quickly settled comfortably near the main observation auto tour route platform where many photographed it. Another **White-winged Scoter** was along the American River Parkway from 29 November through the period (MMA). As is typical in the fall, **Red-breasted Mergansers** were reported from throughout the region. Early birds were at Folsom Lake in Placer County 3 August (RP) and the Thermalito Afterbay in Butte County 30 September—2 November (LH), as were 16 individuals at Folsom Lake in Sacramento County on 16 November (AL). Two birds were at Clifton Court Forebay beginning 16 November (EMo). A **Red-necked Grebe** photographed at the Yolo Bypass WA on 25 September was a first record there (CB), and additional reports came from the American River Parkway in Sacramento County 13–27 October (BA) and Los Banos Creek Reservoir in Merced County 17 November (PD).

**Common Ground Doves** continued expanding into the San Joaquin Valley and are now observed consistently in certain areas such as Bravo Lake in

Tulare County. Reports there spanned the fall period with a high count of seven birds on 3 September (DF, SSu, RH). Two **White-winged Doves** along Tule River in Tulare County on 23 August (SSu) were also notable. A **Common Nighthawk** seen on 12 August was unexpected along the American River in Sacramento County (PL). The species is rarely found in the Central Valley away from traditional spots in the northern Sacramento Valley, which hosted a few individuals, with two reports from Shasta County (GH, DN) and single reports from Tehama (TF) and Butte (KSo) counties.

Three **Chimney Swifts** were among a small flock of aerial insectivores at the Kern Water Bank in Kern County after a rain squall on 2 November (TE). This is the first record of the species in the portion of Kern County within the Central Valley. Contra Costa County got its first **Chimney Swift**; a bird photographed at Clifton Court Forebay on 27 September (EMo). It whizzed by the observer but was photographed from multiple angles showing field marks and body proportions consistent with the species. It was an impressive fall for **Costa's Hummingbirds** in the region, with a minimum of 15 individuals reported. This continues a recent increasing trend in the region but vastly exceeds the numbers found in the falls of recent years.

Fall shorebird migration was led by the stunning **Wood Sandpiper** highlighted above but also saw a great diversity of rarities from shorebird habitats throughout the valley. Both Golden-Plovers found during the period were juvenile **American Golden-Plovers**, with one in a flooded field off Highway 162 in Butte County 17–18 September (LH) and another at Private Property H in Kings County 29 September (MSt). Few records of the species exist for either county. With a continued decline of **Mountain Plovers** throughout their range, local wintering locations in the Central Valley have become increasingly rare. **Mountain Plovers** returned to the barren agricultural fields northwest of Knights Landing, Yolo County for the seventh consecutive winter, first reported on 28 November (JG). The usual flock along Flannery Road in Solano County was first seen on 3 November (RM), and a group of four birds was west of Firebaugh, Fresno County on 10 November (DM, MMo). A likely migrant **Mountain Plover**, and second Yuba County record, was at Beale Air Force Base on 8 October (JLau).

**Snowy Plovers** made a typical fall showing, including at the Neville Road Ponds in Tehama County 11 August (SA); Folsom Lake, Placer County 8 August (RP); Clifton Court Forebay, Contra Costa County 10 September (JB); Lodi WTP in San Joaquin County 23 August (CA); and the Kern County Evaporation Ponds on 21 August (WR). Additionally, there were five records from Yolo County and frequent reports from Kings County, with high counts of six individuals at the Yolo Bypass WA on 1 September (ZP, JJ) and ten individuals at Private Property H on 17 November (MSt).

A **Black Turnstone** at Clifton Court Forebay in Contra Costa County is an exceptional bird in the Central Valley, but surprisingly is the third individual recorded there. All have occurred since 2020 (JB). Another nice find was a striking adult **Red Knot** at Private Property H in Kings County on 2 August (GW). There were three single **Ruffs** reported: in a flooded field northwest of Knights Landing, Yolo County on 4 September (JG), at Tulare WTP in Tulare County 24 August (DF), and at Private Property S in Kings County 9 August (TE). Similarly, there were three single **Stilt Sandpipers**: an adult photographed at the Kern County Evaporation Ponds on 13 August (TE), another that continued from the summer period at the edge of Tulare Lake last reported on 15 August (DF), and a juvenile at the Cosumnes River Preserve 17 August, a nice find for Sacramento County (CCo, JT, KT, PP).

Eight **Sanderling** records were impressive, especially compared to only two reported the previous fall. Four records were single adults in August, at Folsom Lake, Placer County 3 August (RP), the Yolo Bypass WA in Yolo County 9 August (CT, DS), near Bruceville Road, Sacramento County from 11–13 August (AE), and at Private Property S in Kings County 18 August (MSt). A juvenile was at O'Neill Forebay in Merced County 2 October (GW), another was at Clifton Court Forebay 16 September (DM). Two reports were from Private Property H in Kings County, with a single bird on 15 September and a flock of five on 22 September (MSt).

**Willetts** are common fall migrants in the correct habitat through much of the Central Valley, but there are few records from counties in the furthest northern reaches of the Sacramento Valley. Reports at Black Butte Res. in Tehama County 27 August (SA) and Sacramento NWR in Glenn County 21–28 August (LH, MSK, JLu) were notable.

A ragged molting adult **Parasitic Jaeger** at Private Property H was a third Kings County record (MSt). All county records have been from the fall at this location. A juvenile **Parasitic Jaeger** at Thermalito Afterbay 9–12 October (LH) was a first Butte County record. Initially the bird was on the water too far off shore to discern the species. Not to be stopped, the finder boarded an abandoned children's pool float (with optics and camera!) and paddled out into the reservoir to document the bird. The mission was abandoned when the float began losing air but not before the bird was confirmed! Ironically, the bird was found the next day loafing on the beach, offering birders close looks and photos from the comfort of dry land. An adult **Long-tailed Jaeger** at Folsom Lake was a first Sacramento County record and the second record for the reservoir, with the prior record only in Placer (SAb, NA). This individual was observed briefly on 3 September and was observed flying between Sacramento and Placer counties.



Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). 9 October 2024. Thermalito Afterbay, Butte County, California. Photo by Liam Huber.

It was an incredible year for inland **Sabine's Gulls** throughout California and Nevada, and there were at least 12 records from all corners of the Central Valley (Table 1). As expected, the vast majority of these birds were juveniles, but one adult molting out of alternate plumage at White Slough WTP in San Joaquin County on the late date of 13 October was especially noteworthy (CA). So too was a high count of five juveniles together at the Stockton WTP on 27 September, the most ever recorded with documentation in the Central Valley (RRe).

A **Little Gull**, a Eurasian gull and major rarity, spent three days at Stockton WTP 25–27 September (ME, RB). There are few records of this species, but Stockton WTP has hosted multiple individuals in the past. Four **Franklin's Gulls** were found, including an adult at Thermalito Afterbay in Butte County 16 August (LH, MSk), a subadult at Tracy WTP in San Joaquin County 18 August (BM), and juveniles at Sacramento NWR in Glenn County 18 August (BE) and Woodland WTP in Yolo County 12 September (ZP, JJ, EI). **Western Gulls** returned to previous locations at the Thermalito Afterbay in Butte County and Davis Wetlands in Yolo County for their fifth and fourteenth consecutive winters, respectively (LH, JG). A subadult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Fresno WTP at the early date of 30 August (GW), a third county record, was last reported 28 September. **Common Terns** were found at Thermalito Afterbay on 7 September (MMu, CCI), at Bravo Lake in Tulare County on 4 October (DF), and at Private Property H in Kings County on 12 October (GW).

Table 1: Sabine's Gull records from the Central Valley in fall 2024.

Location	County	Date(s) Observed	Age	Initial Obs.	Notes
Clifton Ct Forebay	Contra Costa	21-30 Sep	Juvenile	JB	
Clifton Ct Forebay	Contra Costa	29-30 Sep	Juvenile	EMo	Joined bird found 21 Sep
Fresno WTP	Fresno	27 Sep	Juveniles	GW, RRu	Two present; first in Fresno since 2014
Private Property H	Kings	29 Sep	Juvenile	MSt	
Folsom Lake	Placer	26 Sep	Juvenile	SA	
Stockton WTP	San Joaquin	25-29 Sep	Juveniles	CA, RB	Four present
Stockton WTP	San Joaquin	27 Sep	Juvenile	RRe	Joined previous group of four
White Slough WTP	San Joaquin	13 Oct	Adult	CA	
Black Butte Res.	Tehama	28 Sep	Unspecified	GR, BK	Second county record
Woodland WTP	Yolo	21 Sep	Juvenile	EI	
Woodland WTP	Yolo	26 Sep— 1 Oct	Juvenile	JG	
Woodland WTP	Yolo	27 Sep— 1 Oct	Juvenile	KSw	Joined bird found 26 Sep

A **Red-throated Loon** diving in the Sacramento Deepwater Shipping Channel in Yolo County 22–23 November was the sixth county record (JG). Somewhat more expected was a **Pacific Loon** on Folsom Lake in Sacramento and Placer counties discovered 16 November and continuing into the winter period (AL). Two **Neotropic Cormorants** were present through much of fall 2024 at Fresno WTP, with an adult and juvenile seen together multiple times (GW). They were not reported after 12 October. Another **Neotropic Cormorant** was at Private Property H in Kings County 29 September (MSt), and a handful of reports from the Bakersfield area of Kern County were highlighted by a flock of 12 birds at Grand Island on 28 November (JW). That set a new high count for the species in the Central Valley, continuing the trend of northward range expansion into the region.

Spring and early summer 2024 saw a considerable influx of wayward **Brown Pelicans** into the Central Valley. That pattern had mostly ended by the start of the fall period, but a few individuals were still discovered. One individual continued at Private Property H in Kings County through 2 August (GW). A bird at Stockton WTP on 2 August was likely continuing from summer (DY), but it is hard to know whether the same bird was involved from observations at the end of September (CA, LE, ME). Two **Brown Pelicans** were in Merced County, with one at O’Neill Forebay 12–22 August (KVV) and an out-of-the-blue flyover of Interstate 5 near Erreca Rest Stop on 11 September (HW).

The famous **Roseate Spoonbill**, which has moved about the Central Valley since January 2024, made multiple appearances throughout fall 2024 in both public and private areas. On 3 August, it was photographed at BeeEss Gun Club near Los Banos, the first time it has been observed in Merced County and making for another first county record stopover (PDU, CBRC). On 27 September, it was at Faith Ranch Wetlands, another private area and its second time visiting Stanislaus County (SP, CBRC). Finally, it made intermittent appearances at the San Joaquin River NWR in Stanislaus 25 October and continued through the end of the period (CBRC). It was seen off and on but primarily remained elusive in a closed portion of the refuge. This **Roseate Spoonbill** is now responsible for the first four county records, quite the accomplishment for one bird!

A **Broad-winged Hawk** photographed soaring over Reichmuth Park in Sacramento County on 21 September made for one of few fall records for the Central Valley (ISC). The date is consistent with their known movement on the coast so perhaps keen eyes will discover more in the future. The only **Northern Saw-whet Owl** of the period flew into a window in Clarksburg, Yolo County, during a storm on 22 October (fide MSa). The homeowner briefly brought the bird inside and then released it the same night, and the owl flew off under its own power.

Rare woodpeckers included a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** along Putah Creek at the Highway 128 Bridge in Yolo and Solano counties on 14 November (JG) and **Red-naped Sapsuckers** at Deer Creek, El Dorado County on 23 September (SAb, NA) and in Gates Canyon, Solano County on 24 November (RM).



Eastern Wood-Pewee  
(*Contopus virens*).  
3 August 2024.  
Oak Grove Park, Ripon,  
San Joaquin County, California.

*Photo by Mark Elness.*

An **Eastern Wood-Pewee** was a spectacular find at Oak Grove Park in Ripon, San Joaquin County 2–5 August (CM). The bird was photographed and voice-recorded and was approved by the CRBC as the second accepted San Joaquin County record and the fourth for the Central Valley. Interestingly, both San Joaquin records have come from fall while all other Central Valley records are from June. An **Eastern Phoebe** photographed in a closed portion of the Cosumnes River Preserve on 30 November just barely snuck into the fall period and was never seen again (CCo, MMa, LC). This is the third **Eastern Phoebe** to be recorded at the preserve. **Vermilion Flycatchers**, another species showing recent northward expansion into the Central Valley, were recorded at six scattered locations. Three were in Kern County (WR, JW, KE), one in Kings County (MSt), one in Tulare County (CS), and one 30 November at Llano Seco Wildlife Area in Butte County where it is significantly rarer (KSo). **Plumbeous Vireos** were photographed in Porterville, Tulare County 26 September–5 October (SSu), and at Odd Fellows Cemetery in Sacramento County 10 November (AL). A **Red-eyed Vireo** at Private Property H 13–14 October was the first county record in Kings (MSt).

The only **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** were along Putah Creek in Yolo and Solano counties, with three records spanning Winters to Davis in September and early October (AK, MB, ZP, JJ, CT, LH, GS). The first county Pygmy Nuthatch record was at a yard in Citrus Heights, Sacramento County on

7 September (SF, TH). A **Brown Thrasher**, the first record for Kings County, was at Private Property H 13–14 October, in the same grove of trees as the **Red-eyed Vireo** (MSt). **Sage Thrashers** were in eastern Madera County 22 September (GW) and southern Yolo County 16 October (JG).

One of the biggest shockers of the period was a **White Wagtail** at Tracy WTP 29 September (DY). This bird, which disappeared shortly after its discovery, was photographed as a first for San Joaquin County. Rare anywhere in California, **White Wagtail** is a fantastic rarity inland, as there is only one previous unequivocally accepted record for the Central Valley, photographed near Woodlake in Tulare County on 26 April 2003 (CBRC).

Winter finches were mostly rare, but flyover **Red Crossbills** were notable in Brentwood, Contra Costa County (EMo) and at the Sacramento City Cemetery (AB, LB). Both reports were from November. A **Lapland Longspur** flying over Reedly College Ag Farm on 29 November was apparently an overdue first Fresno County record (TB). Another **Lapland Longspur** at Clifton Court Forebay in Contra Costa County 28 October rounded out the only longspurs of the period (DM).

An adult **Black-throated Sparrow** was at Paynes Creek Wetland in Tehama County 14 August (SL), and a juvenile at Uslan Farm, Yolo County 7–12 September (TU) was the seventh county record. **Brewer's Sparrows** were at five locations: two together each at Gibson Ranch County Park in Sacramento County 8 September (KT), along the Madera Canal 22–27 September (GW), and at Woodland WTP in Yolo County 6 October (ZP, JJ, EMa), and single birds at Private Property H in Kings County 15 and 28 September (GW, MSt). A **Harris's Sparrow** at the Sacramento River NWR's Capay Unit was one of few records for Glenn County (DD).

**Sagebrush Sparrows** were reported intermittently at Lake Yosemite County Park and near the University of California, Merced over 23 September –11 November (DK, ML). Three individuals were together on 21 October, but it is hard to know how many birds were involved. Only one prior eBird record of **Sagebrush Sparrow** exists for Merced County. Four **Swamp Sparrows** were found in late fall, with birds at Twichell Island, Sacramento County 13 November (AE), Buena Vista Rec Area in Kern County 21 November (WR), San Joaquin River NWR in Stanislaus County 24 November (HR), and Yolo Bypass WA 30 November (JG). A low total of three **Green-tailed Towhees** were observed, with two from Sacramento County and one from Fresno County (LP, JWh, CCh).

Fall has increased chances of finding vagrant passerines, and this year was no different. A bobbing **Northern Waterthrush** at the Putah Creek Riparian Reserve in Yolo and Solano counties was seen by many between 15–18 September (SSc). **Black-and-white Warblers** were at Bethel Island,

Contra Costa County on 18 September (EMo), Lone WTP in Amador County on 20 September (TE), and Cosumnes River Preserve in Sacramento County on 13 October (JT). The Amador bird was the first county record for the species. Two locations each had two **Tennessee Warblers** during the period. Reichmuth Park in Sacramento County had single **Tennessee Warblers** on 31 August (JuG) and 27 September (AL), and Putah Creek within Yolo and Solano counties had two individuals simultaneously in mid-September, one a hatch-year and the other an adult (HH, BW, SA). Another **Tennessee Warbler** was at Pine Creek Boat Launch in Butte County 11 September (LH).



Magnolia Warbler  
(*Setophaga magnolia*).  
16 September 2024.  
Deer Creek, El Dorado  
County, California.

*Photo by Mark Sawyer.*

El Dorado County had two first county records in back-to-back days from its narrow sliver of the Central Valley at Deer Creek. The first was a gorgeous hatch-year **Magnolia Warbler**, whose 16–18 September stay allowed many to see it (MSa). Incredibly, a birder chasing the Magnolia found a **Virginia's Warbler** in the same location the following day (EI)! It proved more difficult to relocate but was seen on both 17 and 18 September and photographed. There are few prior records of **Virginia's Warbler** in the Central Valley, and this bird is the furthest north recorded.

Three **American Redstarts** were found, with one near Butte City in Glenn County 10 September (AE) and two at Lake Solano County Park in Solano County. An adult male was photographed 8 September and not seen thereafter (MF), and a female or hatch-year bird was seen 18 September (JA).

**Northern Parulas** were seen at the American River Parkway in Sacramento County 29 August (JLan), at Elkhorn Regional Park in Yolo County 5 September (ZP, JJ), and at Private Property H in Kings County on 13 October (TE).

Multiple **Chestnut-sided Warblers** were found in mid-September, with one at Lone WTP in Amador County on 21 September (Jlu) and another at Putah Creek Fishing Access #1 in Yolo and Solano counties 18–20 September (ZP, JJ, EMa). Colusa County also got its first county **Chestnut-sided Warbler** just outside the Central Valley at East Park Res. on 15 September (LH, MSk). A male **Summer Tanager** was along Cache Creek in Yolo County on 19 September (RC), and another returned to its traditional wintering location at William Land Park in Sacramento County beginning 1 November (AL). Finally, the **Indigo Bunting** found in the summer period continued until 2 August at the Sacramento County Bufferlands (CCo).

We thank the following observers who reported their significant findings to the Central Valley Bird Club's listserv, eBird, and, where appropriate, the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC): Steve Abbott (SAb), Cavan Allen, Judy Allen, Nicole Allison, Stuart Angerer, Bill Avery, Ralph Baker, Linda Barth, Thomas Baxter, Corey Bernabucci, Jerald Britten, Aidan Brubaker, Maggie Bourda, Russ Carpenter, Corey Chen (CCh), Chris Cline (CCI), Chris Conard (CCo), Lynne Cormack, David Dahnke, Patrick Denice, Pete Dunten (PDu), Todd Easterla, Bob Ellis, Lorna Elness, Mark Elness, Andrew Engilis, Karen Evans, Dane Fagundes, Tobias Felbeck, Stephen Fettig, Mel Frisk, Juan G. (JuG), Josh Greenfield, Richard Hasegawa, Geoffrey Helmbold, Terry Hodapp, Harrison Horn, Liam Huber, Emmett Iverson, Julian Johnson, Amanda Kindel, D. Krajnovich, Jerry Langham (JLan), James Laughlin (JLau), Steve Laymon, Andrew Lee, Moses Lopez, John Luther (JLu), Phil Lutz, David Nickerson, Mark Martucci (MMa), Bruce Mast, Ethan Matsuyama (EMa), Colin Meusel, Ethan Monk (EMo), Dominik Mosur, Megan Mosur (MMo), Mary Muchowski (MMu), Roger Muskat, Stephen Perez, Peter Perrine, Zane Pickus, Linda Pittman, Ron Pozzi, Harold Reeve, Rene Reyes (RRe), William Rockey, Mark Sawyer (MSa), Gregory Schilling, Samuel Schmidt (SSc), Dessi Sieburth, Chad Silva, Mike Skram (MSk), James Smith, Mark Stacy (MSt), Kenneth Sobon, Ian Souza-Cole, Steve Summers (SSu), Cameron Tescher, Kevin Thomas, John Trochet, Tom Uslan, Kent Van Vuren, James White (JWh), Bart Wickel, John Wilson, Henry Witsken, Gary Woods, David Yee.

m.obs. = many observers; NWR = National Wildlife Refuge; Res. = Reservoir; SRA = State Recreation Area; WA = State Wildlife Area; WTP = Wastewater Treatment Plant.