

Cosumnes River Preserve and Sunset “Fly-In” Saturday, January 30, 2010

The Cosumnes River Preserve field trip always attracts an appreciative group of birders. Twenty-three people joined Terry Colborn for a full-day of birding on one of the marquee refuges in the Central Valley. Starting on the trail bordering the open wetlands, we were immediately treated to a single Sandhill Crane posing less than 100 feet from the walkway! A Greater Yellowlegs dropped in, signaling its arrival with his familiar three to four note “*tew-tew-tew*” call. Scoping the wetlands we picked out several pair of Gadwall, Cinnamon and Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon along with Ring-necked and Ruddy Duck. Nearby, several pair of Bufflehead were already engaging in breeding behaviors, including the male’s short chases of other males; erecting their bushy crests, giving their heads a larger appearance; and then pumping their heads. In a large cottonwood tree, several Yellow-rumped Warblers feed by making short sorties to pick off flying insects. On a sheltered pond, a female Belted Kingfisher called out, while six Pied-billed Grebe actively fed below her. Moving on, we scoped a number of shorebirds including diagnostic and detailed looks of Wilson’s Snipe, Long-billed Dowitcher, Black-necked Stilt and Least Sandpiper. A Marsh Wren was coaxed into view with imitated call sounds. Nearby, Don Reinberg spotted a Loggerhead Shrike teed-up and quickly got it in his scope for all to see. A young Red-shouldered Hawk called from its perch, while we trained a second scope on it.



We worked our way along Desmond Road, just to the north of the preserve, where we watched several pair of Sandhill Crane dancing. Cranes dance for several reasons; as a year-round activity of pair-bonding; for courtship; and often when they’re about to take off, gaining the needed space to avoid contacting one another’s wings as they take flight. Over one-hundred Greater White-Fronted Geese rested on a berm; in the scope everyone could clearly see the diagnostic white “front” that extends around the bill and back beyond the eye. A dark-morph Red-tailed Hawk was posted atop the radio tower. A beautiful female American Kestrel graced us as she swooped in and landed on an overhead wire.



We stopped enroute on the way to Staten Island Road, and had scope views of a Great-horned Owl perched about 30 yards away, as two River Otters cavorted in the stream just below it. As we watched, a Cooper's Hawk zipped deftly through the trees and out of sight, scattering numerous small passerines in its wake. We drove several miles down Staten Island Road to the flooded rice checks, which were loaded with birds. Over thirty Bonaparte's Gulls fluttered tern-like just above the water's surface, feeding on flying insects. With the sun setting over Mt. Diablo, we watched as hundreds upon hundreds of Tundra Swan flew in, their big, black webbed

feet acting like rudders, as they landed directly in front of us. Overhead, skein after skein of White-fronted Geese, and Snow Geese, with the smaller Ross's Geese mixed in, called to one another as they flew by toward their nighttime feeding grounds. Over a thousand Long-billed Dowitcher, several hundred Dunlin and a few Least Sandpipers could be seen feeding on the small islands within the checks. Interspersed with the swans and geese, were hundreds of Sandhill Cranes that glided in and began to gather in a wet field adjacent to our viewing area. All told, there were several thousand ducks, swans and shorebirds all actively feeding and moving about on the checks.

We saw 82 species in all, including 17 species of waterfowl and 10 species of raptors, under spring-like weather conditions.

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Photos by Bob Chilvers

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