

Napa Solano Audubon Society
Rare Bird Alert #10 - Fall Warbler Migration 9-23-21

Greetings Napa Solano Audubon Members, Family & Friends:

Periodically, we will send out Rare Birding Alerts of uncommon or rare species that have been observed in our area. This report is general information regarding uncommon migrants that have been showing up at Point Reyes National Seashore and other Coastal and Central Valley Migration Hotspots during the month of September. Many of these birds are young, 1st year birds that normally fly down the Central, Mississippi, and Atlantic Flyways and for one reason or another flew west. They are uncommon migrants from the East that rarely show up, and when they do, they are usually in their Fall and/or Juvenile plumage.



Northern Waterthrush

For the past few weeks we have been blessed with on and off favorable East and South Winds that have moved many migrants from inland passageways toward the coast. Beginning the 1st weekend in September, Point Reyes began recording a number of rarer Eastern migrants. On Saturday, September 4th at a small canyon, adjacent the Chimney Rock's Elephant Seal Overlook, known as New Willows we found a **Tennessee Warbler** along with a number of regular Western migrating warblers including **Townsend's, Black-throated Gray, Orange-crowned, Wilson's, Yellow, and MacGillivray's**. This small creek is packed with willows, descends to the coast, and

still has water trickling down from a spring which attracts many migrating species in search of water. In late August, we observed a **Northern Waterthrush** bathing in a pool along the creek. They have a rich dark brown back and head, and heavily striped creamy breast with a noticeable white supercilium. They often walk along the banks of a creek bobbing their tail as they go. The Northern Waterthrush breeds in the Northeastern US and across Canada to Alaska. On the trip South, a few birds mistakenly come down the Pacific Flyway. After observing the Tennessee we headed over to Drake's Beach and found an **American Redstart** flitting in the willows near the Monument, and later in the day found a 2nd Redstart in the cypress trees at Spaletta Ranch. The male Redstart is a striking jet black with wide splashes of orange on the shoulder, wings and tail. They display this bright color by frequently fanning their tails. The females and juveniles are noticeably duller with a gray head and gray-brown back, white chest with splashes of yellow on the shoulder, wings and tail. They breed across the Eastern US and Southern Canada west almost to the Pacific, but rarely in Western States other than in a few locations in Montana, Idaho and Washington.



American Redstart

On Sunday, September 5th we went searching for migrants along the coast just North of Jenner at Russian Gulch, and found another **American Redstart** and Lucas found a **Northern Parula**. It certainly seems like the first wave of migrants this September included quite a few

Redstarts! Meanwhile, Eddie Monson, one of Lucas' birding friends located both a **Black-throated** and a **Brewer's Sparrow** at Point Reyes' Spaletta Ranch. Both are uncommon coastal species from the higher elevation plateaus and desert further East. Last week, NSAS birders David & Denise Hamilton had a Black-throated visit their backyard, eat a bit of seed, take a quick drink and bath in their water fountain, but unfortunately it did not stick around for others to observe. It was a 1st County record! The male Black-throated Sparrow has a jet black triangular throat patch, dark gray-brown crown and un-streaked back with striking white supercilium and malar stripes. The 1st year birds that showed up are less striking but the unstriped back, long tail and white supercilium and malar stripes helped to ID it. They breed in Northern Mexico, and much of the Southwest desert in Arizona, Utah, Nevada and Southwestern California. We drove down and met Eddie at Spaletta and were able to take great photos of each. The Brewer's Sparrow breeds throughout the western high desert and can be found in Northeastern California in such locations such as Portola's Marble Hot Springs and Modoc County. They are one of the more lightly colored sparrows of the west with subtle facial patterns and light gray nape above a finely streaked back. They are members of the spizella family (along with Chipping and Clay-colored) with long tails and thin conical beaks.



Brewer's Sparrow



Black-throated Sparrow

In the late-afternoon, we revisited New Willows and were able to locate a **Black and White Warbler** that had been observed earlier in the day. Near dusk, we drove to the Kehoe Beach parking area along the Pierce Point Road and found another **Northern Waterthrush** in the wet willows alongside the road.

On Saturday, Sept. 11th, Andrew Ford's weekly Bird Walk to Putah Creek turned up a **Chestnut-sided Warbler**, along with many Townsend's, Yellow, Nashville, and Wilson's Warblers. Other birders spotted a **Blackpoll Warbler** further East on the creek the same weekend. I visited Putah Creek later in the week and was able to observe the Blackpoll, which looks so different in its Fall plumage, but was unable to find the Chestnut-sided that frequented the section of the creek known as the "Bird Bath" for several days before and after my visit. (Such is life when looking for migrating warblers!)



Blackpoll Warbler

Last week, after a night of South Winds, we went back out to Point Reyes on Wednesday, September 15th, but not many warblers were present. We returned on Thursday, Sept. 16th after another day of favorable winds. We spotted a distant **Painted Bunting** and an **Eastern Wood-Pewee**, that was calling constantly, at the Lighthouse. Our friends Dessie Sieburth and Logan Kahle found a **Canada Warbler** at Little Mendoza, a small grove of cypress trees North of the Mendoza Ranch, earlier in the day. After not locating it in the grove, we searched the nearby lupines on the adjacent hill and were fortunate enough to spot it. Lucas quietly approached the bird and got great photos! Canada Warblers have a strikingly bright yellow throat, breast and upper belly, as well as yellow lores above the bill toward the eye. The upper belly has a black streaked necklace, however in the Fall, this necklace can be very faint. They have an unstreaked, blue-gray back and head with a vivid white eye-ring. By Friday, with continuing favorable winds, the Outer Point was alive with migrants. I went back out to the Point and by chance met several birding friends. At the Lighthouse, we had terrific views of an **Ovenbird** under the row of Cypress Trees nicknamed “the Oven” by Rich Stallcup. This grove earned its name due to the number of migrating Ovenbirds that have frequented it over the years. The Ovenbird has a rich Olive gray-brown back and head with a thick, medial, orange head stripe bordered in black. It’s underparts are white with long black streaks making it appear like a thrush. Ovenbirds spend most of their time on, or close to the ground, where they build an upright oven-shaped nest. They breed from Northern Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, North into Canada and as far west as Montana. Along with the Ovenbird we located and photographed a rare **Blue-headed Vireo**, a species split, a few years back from the Cassin’s Vireo (which were previously named the Solitary Vireo). Another **Brewer’s Sparrow** turned up in the lupin that blankets the hills below the resident houses near the Lighthouse.



Canada Warbler



Ovenbird

Next, we went to the Chimney Rock parking area and walked along the trail past the Park Residences and up the hill to a number of pines. Here we spotted 2 or 3 **Black-and White Warblers** (a male and probably 2 females) that were feeding in the pines and came close enough for photos. The Black-and-White Warbler is the only warbler that is all black and white with bold black and white stripes on the head and back and bold black streaks down the breast. Males have a black face patch and throat while females are lighter white in these locations and on their breast. Accompanying them was a friendly **Chestnut-sided Warbler** that came down along the trail several times for photo opportunities! In the Spring, Chestnut-sided warblers are a stunning, brightly colored warbler with a bright yellow crown, black face patch, a long, brilliant chestnut streak along it’s flanks and yellow and black stripes down their

backs. However, in the Fall they are transformed from bright spring colors to a more subdued tones. Most of the birds that we see are 1st year juveniles with solid greenish-yellow backs, prominent wing bars, a bold white eye-ring and white throats, breasts, belly and under-tail. They breed almost entirely in the Northeast US from Pennsylvania to Nova Scotia and across Southern Canada as far west as Minnesota. How they ever get to California is one of the great mysteries of migration. One theory is that a very small percentage of birds have their their East-West navigation system switched around and they head West instead of East. They winter throughout Central America and the Northern tip of South America. Lucas went back with birding friends on Saturday and some of the rarities like the Blue-heads Vireo and Ovenbird were gone, but others like the Chestnut-sided and Black-and-White Warblers continued throughout the weekend. Many migrants stay for 2-4 days before continuing on their journey.



Chestnut-sided Warbler



Black & White Warbler

Yesterday, after Lucas finished school, we returned to the Outer Point after seeing eBird's Rare Bird Report, for a Virginia's Warbler, spotted earlier in the day by Jim Holmes. After nearly an hour of searching New Willows we heard a chip that sounded interesting, and sure enough out popped the Virginia's Warbler! This was a young gray bird with a prominent white eye-ring, a very faint yellow blotch on its chest, yellowish rump and vent. Adults show considerably brighter yellow. Virginia's are a small gray warbler of the Rocky Mountain states nesting in steep slopes of Pinyon-Juniper and Oak Woodlands often along mountain creeks from Arizona, New Mexico to Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. There are also a few breeding ground records in Southeastern California, Idaho and Wyoming.



Virginia's Warbler



Virginia's Warbler

If the Eastern winds keep up, the next few weeks should bring in even more Eastern vagrant warblers, so keep an eye out for eBird's Rare Bird Alerts!

Happy Birding, Mark & Lucas Stephenson