

Napa-Solano Audubon's Rare Bird Alert #5 - Mountain Bluebird 1-27-2021

Greetings Napa Solano Audubon Members, Family & Friends:

Location: Periodically, we will send out Rare Birding Alerts of uncommon or rare species that have been seen in our area. Recently we have observed Mountain Bluebirds in 3 different nearby locations: Berryessa's East Side Road in Napa County, Tolay Regional Park located off Lakeville Road in Sonoma County, and at Drake's Corner located near the intersection of Sir Francis Drake Highway and Drake's Beach Road in Point Reyes National Seashore in Marin County. There have been other sightings of a small flock along Flannery and Goose Haven Roads South of Dixon in November and December and a recent sighting near 1770 Mason Road in Fairfield both from Solano County. Although Mountain Bluebirds breed in the higher elevations throughout the Western US and Canada, and winter in the foothills, they seldom make it down to the Bay Area. There are only about a dozen or so eBird records in both Solano and Napa County, less than 10 in Marin County, and only 4 or 5 records in Sonoma (as long as different sightings of the same group of birds are considered a single sighting). Thus we are informing our members that this is a great opportunity to view these birds in our area. There has been a small flock of Mountain Bluebirds along East Side Road at Lake Berryessa since the end of November. On November 28th, Lucas and I counted 18. For more information on this sighting see our eBird checklist found at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76817757> . On January 16th Lucas and I were birding with a group of Young Birders (YAMS) led by Lisa Hug from RROS (Redwood Regional Ornithological Society) and saw 4 Mountain Bluebirds at Tolay Regional Park. They are located in an abandoned vineyard that can be found after passing through a gate along the Causeway Trail that runs East from the parking area. They have been overwintering for several weeks in this vineyard that is located on the North side of the trail. With a little patience you can observe the birds flying up to the trellises and aging vines. For more information on this sighting see our eBird checklist found at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S79368555> . We had a 3rd sighting on Saturday, when Lucas and I were at Point Reyes and drove past Drake's Corner. Lucas spotted a female eating a Potato Bug on a fence post. We believe this bird has been there for the last couple of weeks as we thought we spotted her a couple of weeks ago but it flew off before we could make a positive ID. For more information on this sighting see our eBird checklist found at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S79795622> . In the last couple of weeks, Eric Pilotte, Roger Muskat, Kirk Swenson and several other birders have spotted a small flock at several locations along Mason Road in Green Valley. For more information on this sighting see <https://ebird.org/checklist/S78580388> or <https://ebird.org/checklist/S79053259> .

Identification: Adult male Mountain Bluebirds are a gorgeous sky blue that blankets their head, face, breast and back. Their wings and tail feathers are a striking sky blue. The females are more challenging to identify as they closely resemble female Western Bluebirds. They are a pale, grayish-brown on their heads, breast, and upper backs. Their wings and tail feathers are closer to the brighter sky blue coloration of the male. Their chin is a light, pale gray (almost white) that contrasts with the darker gray upper breast touched with russet hues. Mountain Bluebirds nest in cavities in mountain meadows, grasslands, and sagebrush habitats with scattered trees or shrubs. They winter in pinyon-juniper woodlands feeding on berries and fruit as well as lower elevation grasslands and agricultural fields.



Female Photographed by Mark at Drake's Corner 1-23-21



Male Photographed by Lucas at Honey Lake 1-4-20