

Napa-Solano Audubon's Rare Bird Alert #9 - Lark Bunting 2-16-21

Greetings Napa Solano Audubon Members, Family & Friends:

Periodically, we will send out Rare Birding Alerts of uncommon or rare species that have been seen in our area.

Location: This weekend, Matt Bango, a birder who lives in Napa, found the 1st County Record of a Lark Bunting. The Lark Bunting has been seen regularly in the fields, blackberry bushes, and at a feeder adjacent to 764 Portola Avenue. This address is one of the new apartment building complexes recently constructed off from Peatman Drive which connects to Gasser Drive, near the Southeast Corner of town. It is best to park on an adjacent street as most of the parking slots are reserved for the residents. It was discovered on Monday, February 15th by Matt and then seen by Murray Berner. Lucas and I had no trouble finding it this morning and were joined by several well known Bay Area birders including Jim Lomax and John Luther. We first spotted it near the feeders, and it traveled regularly between the Blackberry bushes, the feeder, and the fields adjacent to the apartment complex.

Identification: This Bunting is an adult male in non-breeding plumage. It is a robust bird approximately the same size as a Golden-crowned Sparrow, but like many buntings, due to its stocky nature, appears even larger. It is known for its broad white wing strip on the outer wing coverts. It has a black face surrounding its bluish bill, and a dark brown head and streaked back. It has a black malar or mustache and its auricular pattern or face patch has a faint white border. It also has dark streaking on the breast and flanks that encase a black breast spot, similar to a song sparrow. When it obtains its breeding plumage it will become a predominantly black bird, with brown tones on the wings and tail, and with its characteristic large white wing patch.

We're hoping the Lark Bunting will remain in Napa for a few weeks, but it's likely to remain for a few days, so if you have the time, get out and see it. As mentioned this is a 1st County Napa Record and there have been only 2 records in Solano County, one along Etzel Road in 2007, seen by Jim Rowoth, Jim Holmes, and Gil Ewing, and the second in 2015 along Flannery and Robinson Roads, seen by Jason Riggio, Albert Linkowski and others. There have been a few other records in Yolo, Contra Costa, Marin, and San Francisco Counties, but these remain very uncommon birds in our area. The Lark Bunting breeds in the grasslands of the mid-west from Oklahoma and Kansas, north through the Dakotas and into Eastern Colorado, Wyoming and Montana into Canada. They typically winter in Texas, Southern New Mexico and Arizona south into Mexico. For more information and photos, see our eBird post located at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S81735812> and Cornell's Birds of the World located at <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/larbun/cur/introduction> .



