

Merced National Wildlife Refuge trip #2! In Partnership with “Los Gatos Birdwatcher” – February 20, 2010

I have had the pleasure to lead trips for the Los Gatos Wild Bird Center for many years, but that's all changed as the store is now the, “[Los Gatos Birdwatcher](#)”. Freddy & John Howell still own the store; they simply re-named it and set out on their own.

This would be our second trip to the Merced NWR. The January trip filled so quickly that we decided to return in February. The weather was wonderful with a storm on its way to hit in the evening. We duplicated our January route with our first stop at the Romero Overlook on Pacheco Pass. We stayed out of the wind and found quite an assortment of interesting species. One flying “cotton-ball” caught our attention. Upon closer inspection it turned out to be a white plumaged Yellow Rump Warbler. The white flash flew from tree to tree. We also found a first of season Northern Rough Winged Swallow.

Once in Los Banos re-found several Cattle Egrets living within the city limits quite easy to spot from the road. When we were close to the Merced NWR we stopped on Sandy Mush Road to watch a large flock of Sandhill Cranes. They were all settled on the ground in a deep, green valley. Two Ferruginous Hawks were circling above. Soon the entire flock of cranes lifted and flew toward the refuge. It was quite spectacular; their red crowns quite vivid with the approach of the breeding season.

Once at the refuge we found a Great Horned Owl sitting along the entrance road. Using this spot for its day roost it would have preferred going un-detected. At the first platform we found the flock of Sandhill Cranes standing in a recently plowed corn field across the pond. They shared the field with several Great Egrets. It was here we also observed first of season Violet Green Swallows.

The auto tour included all the species expected for this time of year. There were many Ross's Geese as compared to a handful of Snow, but we found one blue morph of each! We had fantastic views of a flock of Black Bellied Plovers as they lifted from the pond, circled & returned. You had to look close for the Dunlin, Wilson's snipe & peeps that were also sharing the ponds. The American Avocets were showing breeding plumage and the Marsh Wrens were singing *endlessly* throughout our day.



Asleep by day, active by night – Great Horned Owl – Hubert d'Hondt

Memorable Observations!

- White Crowned Sparrows sunning themselves
- Red Tailed Hawks nest building throughout our day
- Black Bellied Plover flock in flight
- Finding the elusive snipe
- Adult Bald Eagle crossing Pacheco Pass road in front of us

Species found during our adventure total 74
Birds are listed in the taxonomic order currently recognized by the AOU

Greater White-Fronted Goose	Cattle Egret	Wilson's Snipe	Violet Green Swallow
Snow Goose	White Faced Ibis	Killdeer	Marsh Wren
Ross's Goose	Turkey Vulture	Black-bellied Plover	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Mallard	Osprey in route	Rock Pigeon	American Robin
Gadwall	Bald Eagle	Mourning Dove	Northern Mockingbird
American Wigeon	Northern Harrier	Great Horned Owl	European Starling
Northern Pintail	White-tail Kite	Anna's Hummingbird	American Pipit
Northern Shoveler	Red Shouldered Hawk	Nuttall's Woodpecker	Yellow Rumped Warbler
Common Merganser	Red-tail Hawk	Northern Flicker	Spotted Towhee
Green-winged Teal	American Kestrel	Black Phoebe	Song Sparrow
Cinnamon Teal	Sandhill Cranes	Say's Phoebe	White-crowned Sparrow
Ruddy Duck	American Coot	Loggerhead-Shrike	Golden-crowned Sparrow
Pied-billed Grebe	Black-necked Stilt	Western Scrub-Jay	Song Sparrow
American White Pelican	American Avocets	Yellow Billed Magpie in route	Red-winged Blackbird
Double-crested Cormorant	Greater Yellowlegs	American Crow	Tri-colored Blackbird
Great Blue Heron	Long-billed Curlew	Common Raven	Brewer's Blackbird
Great Egret	Long-billed Dowitcher	Tree Swallow	Western Meadowlark
Snowy Egret	Dunlin	Northern Rough Wing Swallow	House Finch
	Least Sandpiper		House Sparrow

Merced NWR, California's Central Valley – Feb, 20, 2010



Most of the pictures above were taken during our trip and provided by trip participants, except the Blue Morph Snow Goose.

- *Blue Morph Snow Goose with Ross's Geese*
Provided by Bill Schmoker
- *Mixed flock of Ross's & Snow Geese* - Hubert d'Hondt
- *Green Winged Teal pair* – Kate Martin
- *Can you find the Marsh Wren?* - Hubert d'Hondt
- *Sunning male White Crowned Sparrow* - Hubert d'Hondt
- *Storm from the east coming in* - Hubert d'Hondt
- *Sandhill Cranes flying and vocalizing* - Hubert d'Hondt

