

Quick Overview – Last year was the first time most of us had visited the Mexican free-tail Bat colony that summers underneath the Yolo Bypass. It was so successful we went back. The Yolo Bypass is part of interstate 80 which takes you right into California's state capitol, Sacramento. The bypass hosts one of the largest Mexican free-tail Bat colonies the state. Each spring it is only the female bats that come here and have their pups; one pup per female. Folks forget that bats are mammals; in fact, they are the only mammal capable of true flight. Each mother has to eat ¼ of her body weight in insects each night in order to produce enough milk for her baby, but after 4 – 5 weeks the pups are flying and eating on their own. One of these little bats (3.4 - 4.3" long, with a 12-14" wingspan) eat 600 – 1000 bugs in one hour and this colony alone consists of over 250,000 bats. So when you add that all up, an entire colony will consume millions of pounds of insects each night! We arrived to the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area in the early afternoon and spent time underneath the bypass looking up. We could see bats high above moving within the expansion joints. This species roost during the day and come out at night to feed, but we were lucky to see one bat fly overhead before it returned to the dark crevices of the bypass. We then drove the auto tour to look for birds before we re-positioned ourselves for the sunset bat eruption. Temps were in the low 90's, not the ideal time to locate birds but we found a few! Great Blue Herons, Snowy, Great & Cattle Egrets were all here. We found a pair of hunting White-tailed Kites who had just caught a mouse. Swainson's Hawks can still be found in the Central Valley although they have started their migration south and we found one circling above. A wet patch was too far off to get great views from the road, but we could clearly ID Wilson's Phalaropes in amongst gulls, terns & peeps and White Faced Ibis were all around. After having dinner amongst the habitat we headed for the levee where we would have great views of the bypass. While here we watched a pair of Belter Kingfishers pair bonding, although it did not look like much bonding going on! Soon the sun was down and the bats started to come out. They emerge in shifts, group by group, by the hundreds flying off in ribbons high up into the sky. You think it's about over and then more emerge. Before long they were all around us & overhead. We left long before the action stopped, but we had to head back to the bay area before it got too late. It was a learning experience for all!

Birds Observed –

Canada Goose
Mallard
Ring-necked Pheasant
Pied-billed Grebe
Double-crested Cormorant
American White Pelican
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Cattle Egret
Black Crowned Night Heron
White Face Ibis
Turkey Vulture
Golden Eagle en route
Northern Harrier
White-tail Kite
Red-tail Hawk
Swainson's Hawk
American Kestrel
Killdeer
distant peeps
Wilson's Phalarope
Black-necked Stilt
Caspian Tern
California Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Great Horned Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Black Phoebe
Loggerhead-Shrike
Common Raven
American Crow
Barn Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Red-winged Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Western Meadowlark
American Goldfinch



All images taken during our day - Cattle Egrets amongst the cattle! – Tony Woo / The group looking up at the bats visible between the bypass expansion joints – Tony Woo / As the sunset the colors overhead were beautiful – Julie Bryson / At dusk the bats started to emerge from underneath the bypass – Clyde Nagakura