Field Trip Report: March 2, 2013  
Capay Valley  
Trip Leader: Terry Colborn

After a mid-week storm the skies cleared, giving way to a bright, crisp morning as thirty birders gathered in Esparto to join Terry Colborn on this annual field trip through idyllic Capay Valley in rural Yolo County, timed to coincide with the bloom of the hundreds of acres of almond orchards. At our first stop at historic Capay Cemetery, the final resting place for many of Capay Valley’s early settlers and pioneer families, we found many of the usual suspects including a few **White-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** a pair of **Western Bluebirds, Acorn Woodpecker** and a beautiful male **Anna’s Hummingbird** displaying from a nearby promontory.

A baker’s dozen **Turkey Vulture** were moving off of their roost. Several **Northern Flicker** and a **Nuttall’s Woodpecker** announced their presence. Terry heard a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** drumming, which we tracked down to a nearby oak. A pair of **Hutton’s Vireo** was seen chasing one another about, no doubt displaying courtship behavior. The cemetery is a known nesting site for this bird. A stop at the Capay Bridge, we first heard, and then saw a nice a male **Phainopepla** perched on a treetop near the road. We were able to get a scope on the bird for everyone to see its red eye and silky black crest. Views from the CR 85 bridge overlooking Cache Creek provided us with two **Violet-green Swallow** in among the several dozen **Tree Swallow**, two female **Hooded** and one **Common Merganser**. Right below us we watched as several **Lesser Goldfinch** bathed in a small pool, while a **Lincoln’s Sparrow** put in a brief appearance. On our post lunchtime walk down CR 81 we added a number of new birds, including another **Red-breasted Sapsucker**, a singing **Bewick’s Wren** and several **Oak Titmouse**, while a **Northern Harrier** flew gracefully over the green hillsides. Diane Colborn, Terry’s wife, spotted a pair of **Lawrence’s Goldfinch**, which turned out to be a new bird for several folks. **A Cooper’s Hawk** was perched briefly, as we watched a **Golden Eagle** soaring overhead. Len Blumin was able to capture a nice photo of several **Golden Crowned Sparrow** feeding on the petals of almond blossoms, something many of us hadn’t seen before. We watched **Yellow-billed Magpie** checking potential nesting sites, as several pair of **Western Bluebird** and **Lesser Goldfinch** made for a nice contract against the blooming almond trees.
We continued our birding pursuit with our last stop at the Rumsey Bridge, a site that has been pretty productive over the years. We were surprised to see a beautiful River Otter hauled out on the rocks just below the bridge; we watched as it soon swam up stream and out of sight. In the Gray Pines (formally called Digger Pine) we spotted several Great Blue Heron on their nests in one of the very few rookies in Yolo County. A pair of White-tailed Kite doing aerial courtship displays was joined by a third bird, which was soon driven off by one of the two kites; he clearly hadn’t been invited to the party!

We enjoyed a great day in this wonderful little valley, and tallied 70 species for our efforts.

By Terry Colborn
Photo: Len Blumin