

Field Trip Report - Capay Valley
February 19, 2011
Leader: Terry Colborn

After a stormy week the skies cleared, giving way to a bright, crisp morning as twenty-five birders gathered in Esparto to join Terry Colborn on this always popular annual field trip through idyllic Capay Valley in rural Yolo County. As we gathered in Esparto, a pair of **Red-shouldered Hawks** cavorted overhead, calling loudly to one another. Our first stop at historic Capay Cemetery, the final resting place for many of Capay Valley's early settlers and pioneer families, was unusually quiet, no doubt due to the frosty morning. A pair of **White-tailed Kites** was actively hunting over an open field, as a few **White-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** began to emerge from a nearby brush pile. We scoped a pair of **Western Bluebirds**, as an **Acorn Woodpecker** was spotted atop a snag; it was soon joined by several others. We watched as a beautiful male **Anna's Hummingbird** displayed from a nearby promontory. Several **Northern Flicker** and a **Nuttall's Woodpecker** announced their presence.



White-crowned Sparrow

In route to our next stop at the Capay Bridge, our leader spotted 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 bridge overlooking Cache Creek provided us with our first-of-the-season **Spotted Sandpiper**. Three **Vesper Sparrows** in the nearby park were the first-ever seen in 20+ years of this annual trip. Sharp eyes spotted an adult **Bald Eagle** as it soared in the clouds above us. A **Loggerhead Shrike** posed long enough for all to view it in the scope.



We moved on to CR 81, where we parked and walked along the road; blooming almond orchards on one side, a riparian area on the other. **Western Bluebird**, **Lesser Goldfinch** and **Yellow-billed Magpie** were all present. A single oak tree

yielded two **Red-breasted Sapsucker**, a **Downey Woodpecker**, a **Northern Flicker**, three **Acorn Woodpeckers** and a **Nuttall's Woodpecker**! Near the end of the road, we glimpsed a **Cooper's Hawk** as it swooped through the orchard, chased from behind by a **Red-tailed Hawk**! A **Golden Eagle** glided along the foothills, giving everyone diagnostic views, in comparison to the **Bald Eagle** seen earlier.

As we headed backed, a stunningly beautiful **Merlin**, of the nominate *columbarius* race,



Capay Merlin

perched atop an oak giving us over ten minutes of scope views. A number of participants remarked they had never studied a Merlin that long in a scope. Many of us thought it was the “bird of the day.” We continued our birding adventure with a stop at the Rumsey Bridge, a site that has been pretty productive over the years. We were able to coax a **California Thrasher** out of the brush, but its all-too-brief appearance was unsatisfactory for many. As we enjoyed our views of the beautiful and very scenic Capay Valley, we watched as a half-dozen **Western Bluebirds** performed aerial displays as they fed on hatching insects. We tallied 64 species for the day.

Report by Terry Colborn
Photos by Robert Stokstad