

## Field Trip Report - Yuba Pass and Sierra Valley

June 18, 2011

Leaders: Phil and Pat Gordon

Fifteen of us joined our leaders, Phil and Pat Gordon, for a memorable two days in the beautiful Sierras. With snow above 6,000 feet from the late storms, the birds and wildflowers were about



*Evening Grosbeak pair, Photo by Dave Herrema*

three weeks later than usual. At lower elevations, the high water and flooded meadows made for great birding and the list of species was impressive. We started early Saturday morning at the SnoPark at the top of the pass where a flock of **Evening Grosbeak** and **Cassin's Finch** fed along the road. Highlights were **Western Tanager**, **Chipping Sparrow**, **Dusky and Willow Flycatcher**, **Pine Siskin**, **Hermit Thrush**, and **Mountain Chickadee**.

Moving on to a lower elevation, we had nice looks at a **Hermit Warbler** and watched an **American Dipper** feeding stoneflies to a juvenile at the SFS

Field Station on the North Fork of the Yuba River. **Anna's** and **Calliope Hummingbird** were feeding at Bassett's Station and a **Stellar Jay** was nesting. Moving on to Sand Pond, we saw **Macgillivray's Warbler** and Phil showed us the field marks on a dead Wilson's Warbler. The view to the snow covered Sierra Buttes framed the pond. Courting **Wilson's Warblers** were active in the alders along the creek. Pat pointed out a Mountain Yellow-legged Frog, an endangered species, in the water along the boardwalk trail. Gold Lake was still partially covered in ice and **Mountain Bluebird** were active over the lake. We then moved on to Carman Valley, where we found **Green-tailed Towhee**, **Sandhill Crane** with juveniles, **Red-breasted Sapsucker**, **White-headed Woodpecker**, **Black-headed Grosbeak**, and nesting **Western Wood-Pee-wee**. As we were leaving the area, we spotted a cinnamon-colored Black Bear with two cubs and were able to watch them for some time.



*Western Tanager, Photo by Steven van der Veen*

Early arrivals on Sunday morning spotted a pair of **Pine Grosbeak** at the SnoPark. We then headed over the Pass to the Sierra Valley, the largest mountain valley west of the Mississippi. This beautiful 100,000 acre valley at 5,000 feet was green and wet and a great place for birding.

Highlights of stops at Quail Road, CalPine Road, and Marble Hot Springs Road included **Brewers Sparrow** in full song, **Horned Lark**, and **Vesper Sparrow** in the meadows and in the



*Sand Pond with view to Sierra Buttes, Photo by Dave Herrema*

ponds - **Redhead Duck**, **American Bittern**, flocks of **White-faced Ibis**, and **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** feeding young and displaying for us. Lunch time found us at the corral of the Maddalena Ranch, owned by the Feather River Land Trust. A new observation deck provided views of the abundant bird life of the sagebrush habitat, including the fairly uncommon **Sage Thrasher**, and a very long-distance sighting of **Short-eared Owl**. Moving on along A24, we observed **Swainson's Hawk** nesting in a Cottonwood and a variety of birds in the mix of trees, shrub, and wetlands of the valley including **Avocet**, **Wilson's**

**Phalarope**, **Long-tailed Curlew**, **Great-tailed Grackle** and **Tricolored Blackbird**. We ended our trip at Smithneck Park, outside of Loyalton, where the highlight was **Lewis' Woodpecker** nesting in a telephone pole. We thank Phil and Pat for a great trip and for their pre-trip scouting to find the best areas below the snow.

By Vicky Van Meter