



Humboldt Field Trip
By Bruce Thomsen

Twelve of Napa Solano Audubon Society gathered in Arcata on October 15 to meet our guide for the day, Ken Burton. Our first stop was 23 miles north at Big Lagoon. The weather was cool and overcast with low lying fog farther out in the ocean. Big Lagoon has the advantage of wetlands, lagoon and ocean and we got off to a good start with a small raft of marbled murrelet, surf and white-winged scoters, western grebes, red-throated loons and numerous shorebirds, totaling about 33 species.

Our next stop was Hill Park and water treatment ponds for McKinleyville. Hiller Park sits on a bluff overlooking the Mad River as it flows into the ocean. Lots of cedar waxwings, black-capped and chestnut-backed chickadees, over 1000 American wigeon, white-crowned and golden crowned sparrows, and 39 species.

Our next stop was at the Arcata wetlands and water treatment plant oxidation ponds (a must stop in the area for great birding). Too many waterfowl to count. This was where we found our first of many Aleutian cackling geese flying overhead. We spotted our only Eurasian widgeon here, and lots of shorebirds as well; American avocets, dunlin, marbled godwits, western sandpipers, among others. The shoreline was teeming with marbled godwits, long-billed curlews, and least sandpipers. The waterfowl included green-wing teal, gadwall, and ruddy's among others. One interesting bird was a hybrid western gull X glaucous-winged gull. This was the only glaucous-winged we saw, the common gull in the area was the western. The sun had finally decided to appear and we were in sunlight or high fog the rest of the day.

On our way out to Samoa, we drove along Old Samoa Rd. (Arcata Bottoms – V Street loop) where there were lots of red-tailed hawks as well as red-shouldered hawks, American kestrel, northern harrier's and white-tailed kites. The V Street loop is surrounded by farmland and there is no access off of the road except for one parking

access the CDFW maintains. It is a good area for egrets, herons, pipets, wrens and sparrows as well as some shorebirds in the fields.

Moving on towards the end of Samoa spit we stopped on Lincoln Ave. just off of New Navy Base Rd. to walk the Horse Pasture Trail. This area is maintained by volunteers and the trail wasn't well maintained so we brushed it a bit. Both chickadees were here and we saw a Caspian tern over the bay a short-ways away. The surprise was a tropical kingbird on power lines flycatching in a residential area. Although rare along the coast the tropical kingbird is not uncommon to see in this area.

Moving along to our last spot of the day. We backtracked to the Samoa Bridge, cutting across the bay to Eureka and to the southern part of Humboldt Bay at the Elk River Wildlife Sanctuary. A small parking access to the bay where Elk River enters the bay (the Elk River is the only major river to enter Humboldt Bay. We were immediately treated to a red-shouldered hawk flying across the parking lot. Then a peregrine falcon perched on a utility pole giving us a great look. Black-bellied plovers on the spit of land formed by the river entering the bay. A Wilson's snipe flew from the access area to the spit. Caspian terns, short-billed gulls, California Gulls and western gulls. This site is next to the Eureka waste water treatment plant and there were many American widgeon and mallards on the ponds.

Coming onto 6:15 we had dinner reservations at Café Marina & Woodley's Bar on Woodley Island were several of us enjoyed a nice meal and recapped the day. Sunday morning, we began the long journey home with a stop first at the North Jetty on the tip of Samoa, high fog and no wind. Andrew Ford became our leader for the day, Andrew is very familiar with the area having attended Humboldt University. The first time I have been to the jetty without spray blowing into my face, everything was dry and comfortable. Common loon, red-throated loon, red-necked grebes, common murre were in the channel between the two jetty's along with the usual double-crested and pelagic cormorants, brown pelicans, western grebes. Walking out to the jetty tip we found black turnstones, more marbled murrelets, surfbird and a wandering tattler. We were able to observe both the surfbird and tattler next to one another for comparison. Lots of fish apparently in the water as pelicans and others were having a feeding frenzy. A stop at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge on the south end of the bay. We were treated to a Virginia Rail in the slough next to the visitor center. In the willows along the trail were both chickadees and yellow-rumped warblers (mainly Myrtles, which was the common warbler seen throughout our stay), wrentits and bushtits. One last stop for a few staying an extra day or leaving later was King Salmon looking for a harlequin duck which did not materialize. Overall, a wonderful trip with about 109 ½ species found. The ½ species according to Ken Burton was the glaucous-winged hybrid. Our next visit to the area may be in the springtime.